

Acknowledgement of ‘High Ability’ in Norwegian Higher Education

*A qualitative case study of one Teacher Education
Program, and one Special Pedagogy Program*

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Abstract

Children that have potential for exceptionalities or that have displayed such exceptionalities receive quite a lot focus internationally. These children are in this research referred to as highly able children. Issues of equity and equality of education are seen as important arguments in the international focus of highly able children. These issues are also prevalent in the Norwegian educational system. The aim of this research has been to explore to what extent highly able children and their needs are focused on through higher education programs in Norway and in such to investigate the place highly able children are given within important educational ideas that are seen to promote equity and equality of education in the Norwegian context.

The research has been approached qualitatively and a case study design where three participants are seen as separate cases is used. Purposeful sampling led to the choice of the three participants, where two are connected a teacher education program and one is connected to a special pedagogy program. Two participants were chosen from the teacher education program, since one of them represents a specialization course linked to the field of special pedagogy. The methods of data collection have been interviews and document analysis. The collected data was analyzed by using coding, which subsequently led to five categories. These categories have been used in the structuring of the data, and have ultimately served as a way to approach the questions asked in the research.

The findings of the research indicate that the extent to which the needs of the highly able children are acknowledged and focused on through the educational programs is little. It was found that although there seemed to be some differences in how participants viewed how the focus and acknowledgement and *should be*, all of the participants revealed that the extent to which their educational program focus and acknowledge the needs of highly able children is little, if at all present. Although no conclusions can be drawn as to how other workers within higher education and education focus on and acknowledge the needs of highly able children, the findings seem indicate that the educational framework in Norway in terms of written documents leave much up to interpretation. The findings also points to that the big room for interpretations together with no found research on higher levels than master levels on the highly able in the Norwegian context since 1971, may lead to that the needs of highly able

children are overshadowed. In such, there seems to be a possibility of that safeguarding of meeting the needs of highly able children is not ensured.

The questions that rise from the research are related to the history of Norwegian educational ideas, equity and possible consequences of not facing a controversial topic.

“Quality must be seen in light of how societies define the purpose of education. In most, two principal objectives are at stake: the first is to ensure the cognitive development of learners. The second emphasizes the role of education in nurturing the creative and emotional growth of learners and in helping them to acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. Finally, quality must pass the test of equity: an education system characterized by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission”.

Education for All: The Quality Imperative,
EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005,
UNESCO, Paris, 2004

Acknowledgements

To approach a topic that there is little research on and that at the same time is of a controversial character has been challenging- both personally and academically. At the end of it, I am not only proud, but also thankful for the process in which I have been in the last couple of years. Under the process different people have offered their help and support in their own ways, and I would like express my gratitude to these people.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

DMGT	-	Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talented
ISCED	-	International Standard Classification of Education
KD	-	Kunnskapsdepartementet [<i>Ministry of Education</i>]
KUF	-	Kirke-, utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet [<i>Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs</i>].
NHO	-	Norsk Handels Organisasjon [<i>Norwegian Trade Organization</i>]
NOU	-	Norges Offentlige Utredninger [<i>Official Norwegian Report</i>]
NSD	-	Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste [<i>Norwegian Social Science Data Services</i>]
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
SNL	-	Samfunns og Næringslivsforskning AS [<i>Society and Business Research AS</i>]
Udir	-	Utdanningsdirektoratet [<i>Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training</i>].
UFD	-	Utdannings og Forsknings Departementet [<i>Ministry of Education and Research</i>]
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The Unified School	-	Enhetsskolen
The Core Curriculum	-	Den generelle læreplanen
The Quality Framework	-	Prinsipper for opplæringen
The Educational Act	-	Opplæringsloven
Guidelines to the Educational Act	-	Retningslinjer til opplæringsloven
Adjusted Education	-	Tilpasset opplæring
Proposition to the Storting	-	Odelstingsproposisjon

1 Introduction

Internationally there is an extensive and ongoing debate on the topic of people who have high capacity for learning. The debate seems to include both who this group of people may be, why some people have higher capacities for learning, and how the education best can be adjusted to their needs. Different educational contexts and fields leads to different contributions, and arguments in the debate. This is to say that different countries relate to the issue of high capacity learners differently. The term used in this thesis for such high capacity will be ‘high ability’. The term will be defined as people that either have a potential for exceptionalities or have displayed such exceptionalities, and their potential may be discovered or undiscovered. A further elaboration on the term and issues concerning defining it will be treated further in sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

1.1 Background and motivation

The idea of ‘high ability’ as a thesis topic came to life through experiences made from being a student at a bachelor program in Special Pedagogy. Through readings done on the syllabus literature early on in the three-year course of the program, I found mentioning of that in some countries; children with high abilities are included in the field of special pedagogy (Befring, 2004). Furthermore, it was stated that inclusion of this group of people in the field of special pedagogy could be positive for the field in that it contribute to that special needs is seen as something positive (Ibid). However, after searching for the topic of high ability in other sources on the syllabus it struck me that other definitions and descriptions of the special pedagogy field seemed to leave out the highly able. In these sources there was no mentioning of that these children deliberately was left out of the definition. I started to wonder what the needs of these children in fact is seen as being in the Norwegian context, and if there is a discrepancy in the field in terms of views on this group.

Since little was found in the syllabus literature, I searched the internet for information on highly able children in the Norwegian context. Through this, I found stories and specific cases where parents of pupils tell their experiences of having children with high abilities in the Norwegian school. Many of them expressed concerns as to how they feel the school system is failing their children. My interest in investigating the subject of high ability in the Norwegian context grew, and led me to talk to my fellow students and people around me about the issue.

There seemed to be a lot controversy connected to this group of people, and a common understanding seemed to be that an increased focus on the highly able would be at the expense of children with learning disabilities. The discussions that led from this were rarely fruitful, and the conclusions drawn by others often seemed to be that I supported the idea of an elitist school system. I felt that my point of view did not come across and was provoked by the lack of room for discussion on the topic. I started to wonder if the issue of high ability was overlooked and to what extent the needs of these people are acknowledged.

Being enrolled in a higher education program and to experience, that ‘high ability’ was an issue difficult to approach within the educational environment I was a part of, led to the focus on this thesis. The question that became important to me was to what degree people working within education have knowledge about children with ‘high ability’.

1.2 Rational

1.2.1 The Norwegian Context

The initial idea of this research was to compare different educational system and in such reveal differences and similarities between the two contexts, when it comes to the issue of high ability. However, high ability may be seen as a socio- cultural construct, and in such it may be understood differently from society to society (Persson 2005). Thus, to compare the coverage of high ability across countries was seen as difficult since there most likely would be variations in educational contexts, goals of education, terms used on the highly able, and what these terms are seen to entail. The experiences of that there seems to exist little literature and research on the highly able children in the Norwegian context points out that there may be a need of research on the topic. Due to the possibility of differences between contexts, a comparison between countries could lead to results that would be less useful for the specific educational context that the research aims to contribute to knowledge in- in this case the Norwegian context. Hence, the focus of this research has been only on the Norwegian educational system.

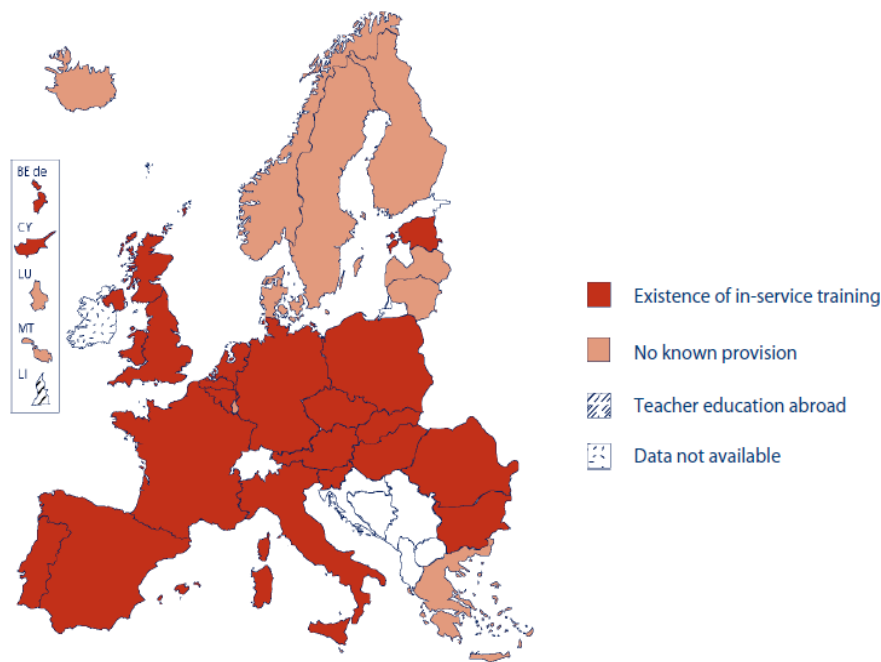
1.2.2 The issue of equity of education

By doing further investigations on the Norwegian educational system, it was found that the “educational equity has been a main concern for the Norwegian policies on basic education since at least 1884” (Solstad, 1997, p.44). Solstad (1997) points out that previously the term equity was understood as equality of education where all pupils were to receive equal education, whereas today there is an understanding of that equity is reached through a focus on diversity. Through the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2005) equity is linked to the issue of the quality of education, which has been a prevalent issue in educational debates in Norway in past years. In such, this research may be a contribution not only to the field of high ability, but also to how equity and subsequently quality of education may be seen in relation to highly able children.

1.2.3 Higher education institutions

It is assumed that education on any topic that has relevance for educators in school, should or be provided through either higher education or in- service training. As seen from Figure 1.1, presented below, there is no known in-service training on the topic of high ability for Norwegian teachers in International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) - levels 1 to 3, which represents the primary, lower- and upper secondary level of education on the UNESCO classification scale (UNESCO 1997).

Figure 1.1: Provision of in-service teacher training on the promotion of ‘giftedness’ (ISCED 1 to 3)



Source: Eurydice (2006)

Although there is no known provision of this, one cannot disregard the fact that some schools may provide their teachers with in-service training on the topic. Nevertheless, no known provision may point to that there are big differences between schools and that possible existing in-service teacher training may lack structure. In such, although research on the in-service training of educational staff would be interesting, it will not be a focus through this research.

1.3 Research Aims

It is assumed that the coverage and views on highly able children that exists in the higher education institutions to some degree influence the views and educational praxis of the future work force. The aim of this research is of an exploratory character, and aims to find out how ‘highly able children’ are acknowledged and focused on in Norwegian higher education institutions. Furthermore, the aim is to contribute to information within a field that seems to have received little focus in the Norwegian context, and ultimately possibly facilitate further research.

1.4 Research Questions

To investigate this issue, the main research question of this research has been:

To what extent are the needs of children ‘with high ability’ acknowledged and focused on in two Norwegian higher education programs- Special Needs Education and Teacher Education?

With knowledge of the Norwegian educational system, it seems that education should be organized according to the needs of children. For example, if a child is considered to have special needs, special needs education may be provided, if not they will receive Adjusted Education through the ordinary education. Thus, the question becomes:

1- Does the term ‘special needs’ entail ‘highly able’ children in the Norwegian context?

Second, knowledge of similarities and differences between the different educational programs, may reveal information on the actual acknowledgement and focus on these children, and is treated through the following sub- question:

2- What are the similarities and differences between the two higher education programs?

Third, it is of interest to find out who are seen as responsible for the highly able children, and whether the participants view the alumni’s of the programs to hold any responsibility for meeting the needs of highly able children. The term ‘responsible’ is here understood as what profession that should work towards meeting the needs of the highly able children. This will be treated through the following sub- question:

3- Who are considered responsible for meeting the needs of the ‘highly able’ children?

1.5 Limitations

1.5.1 Issues of high ability

At present date, there are many views on what the field of high ability should entail. Different researchers and theorists present different views on what is considered to be of importance. Among the issues that seems to be most prevalent are intelligence-testing and whether IQ-scores are sufficient in establishing who is highly able and not; how education best can be planned and executed in classrooms; why some people are highly able and if abilities is

something immanent in the child or is a result of environmental influences (see section 2.1.1). Although some of these issues will be mentioned to create a foundation for the research, to go into debates connected to these issues is outside of the scope of this research. The focus will be on acknowledgement and focus of highly able children in higher education. In such, conclusions as to how one *should* understand high ability and how the educational system *should* be organized to meet highly able children is not included in the research.

1.5.2 Teacher education and special pedagogy program

It is recognized that other higher educational programs also educate people to be workers within education. However, they will not be focused on in this research. The focus of this thesis has been on two higher education programs- A teacher education program and a special pedagogy program.

1.5.3 Issues of quality

Several issues may be investigated when it comes to the focus and acknowledgement in the educational programs, and one may have different approaches to the investigation. Firstly, one may use an approach that may be referred to as a quantity approach i.e. too search for structural differences between the programs (such as weeks of praxis and length of study). Although, these differences may be easy to detect, one may argue that they have little relevance in this research in terms of understanding the actual question of this research. This is to say, that the issue of quantity may be less important than findings from a quality approach, i.e. how certain concepts of education and highly able children are viewed by the participants. Thus, the focus in this research has been on the qualitative issues of the higher educational program.

1.6 Methodology

A qualitative approach is by Simons (2009) pointed out as useful in research where complexities are evident in the research questions, and is chosen since high ability may be a controversial topic, and that in-depth understandings have been necessary to address the main research question raised in section 1.4. The research has been designed as a multiple case-study, where three cases each consisting of one individual, have been object of research. This

was considered useful since a case- study design is seen to enable insight into particularities of cases (Yin 2009). The sampling procedure has been purposeful, and the three participants were chosen because of the position they hold within the program they represent. Two participants are connected to a teacher education program at a University College; whereas one participant is connected to the general teacher education and one participant is connected to a specialization course in Adjusted Education and special pedagogical considerations. The third participant is connected to a special pedagogy program at a University.

Two methods were used in the data collection: Document analysis, as a way to get an understanding of the educational context as well as to serve as a background for interview responses, - and semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide, to enable in- depth understandings of the how the participant 'view the world' (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Through transcribing the interviews and use of codes, five categories were developed and were used in structuring the data.

Furthermore, two tests have been used in judging the quality of the research, notably construct validity and reliability.

1.7 Structure of thesis

- Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework. Consists of the literature review and the theoretical framework of the research. Definitions and explanations important for the two main issues of this research: High ability and the Norwegian educational system will be given.
- Chapter 3: Methodology. Describes the methodological considerations of the research
- Chapter 4: Main results- Provides a schematic overview over the main findings of the research, divided into findings from document analysis and interviews.
- Chapter 5: Discussion- Includes analysis of the interviews and documents according to the sub questions of this research. Through this chapter, the categories used to analyze the findings will be treated.
- Chapter 6: Main Findings- The main research question is treated.

- Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

2 Theoretical Framework

All the concepts in the following are considered to make a fundament for the further research. First, an introduction to high ability, the history and what the term is considered to entail in this research will be given. In this there will also be presented view on what roles educators may have in work with highly able children (2.1). Second, a brief presentation of the history of the Norwegian educational system will be presented, and serve as a background for the present context and challenges of education within the country (2.2).

Furthermore, what roles teachers and special educationalists are seen to have within the present educational system will be important for the further research, since the roles and responsibilities most likely will influence on the content and organization of the two higher educational programs that are investigated through this research- notably special pedagogy and teacher education (2.3). Descriptions found online, of what alumni's of the different educational programs are expected to have learned will sum up this chapter.

Finally, section 2.4 will look into the present focus on highly able children in the Norwegian context.

2.1 High Ability

2.1.1 History of high ability

Throughout history, different societies have at different times shown interest in people that show exceptionalities (Renzulli, 2005). For example, as Renzulli points out: "as early as 2200 B.C., the Chinese had developed an elaborate system of competitive examinations to select outstanding persons for government positions" (2005, p. 246). Another shown interest in the field came with Sir Francis Galton's book, 'Hereditary Genius' (1869). In his book, Sir Francis Galton proposes, "a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance..." (Galton 1869, p. 1). In such, Galton's work can be placed within the field of biology of high ability which often is seen to entail issues of whether abilities is gained through inheritance/gens or through environmental influences, such as education and upbringing (Grinder, 1990, Simonton, 2005). It seems likely that Sir Galton's work have influenced on the current field of biology of high ability. Nevertheless, the field today seems to be broader than at Sir

Galton's time. Although some researchers still work with the question of 'nurture vs. nature', it seems that most of the researchers are concerned with the importance of encouraging the child's innate abilities (Simonton, 2005). The issue of whether highly able parents give birth to highly able children may thus be controversial today.

The debate of whether high ability is congenital or a result of environmental influences is only one part of the history of high ability field. Other fields of interest through history have been: (1) the explanations as to why some people seem to possess such qualities and what these qualities in fact are considered to be. 2) why it is important to focus on this group of people within education and society. 3) and, how schools and societies should meet the needs of this group of people (Renzulli, 2005).

However, some historical changes may be seen as important for the development within all of these branches of gifted/high ability research. One of these is what is known as the Marland report. In 1972, the U.S. Commissioner of Education at the time, Sidney P. Marland, published a report on the state of giftedness in the country's educational system. It may be of importance to point out that in the American context the group that in this thesis is called highly able, are referred to as gifted. The Marland-report states that "Gifted and Talented children are, in fact, deprived and can suffer psychological damage and permanent impairment of their abilities to function well which is equal to or greater than the similar deprivation suffered by any other population with special needs served by the Office of Education" (Marland 1972, pp. xi-xii). This points out that the Marland-report (1972) emphasized high ability and learning disabilities equally in terms of consequences of a deprivation in education and furthermore, that giftedness was seen as a special need in terms of education. The fact that the Marland-report referred to gifted as the most neglected students in the U.S, may have contributed to a change in the country's educational system when it comes to focusing on giftedness (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2007). It seems likely that the report also has influenced the views on unfortunate consequences of not focusing on these children, and the debate of whether schools play a role in these children's development.

The Marland- report contributed to the "first federal definition of giftedness that included multidimensional criteria for the identification of the gifted" (Sternberg & Kaufman 2007, p. 385). Furthermore, it led to the first legislative action for the gifted and talented, leading both to allocation of funding to improve gifted education in the US and the establishment of the National Office of Gifted and Talented (Ibid). In such, the Marland- report created a further

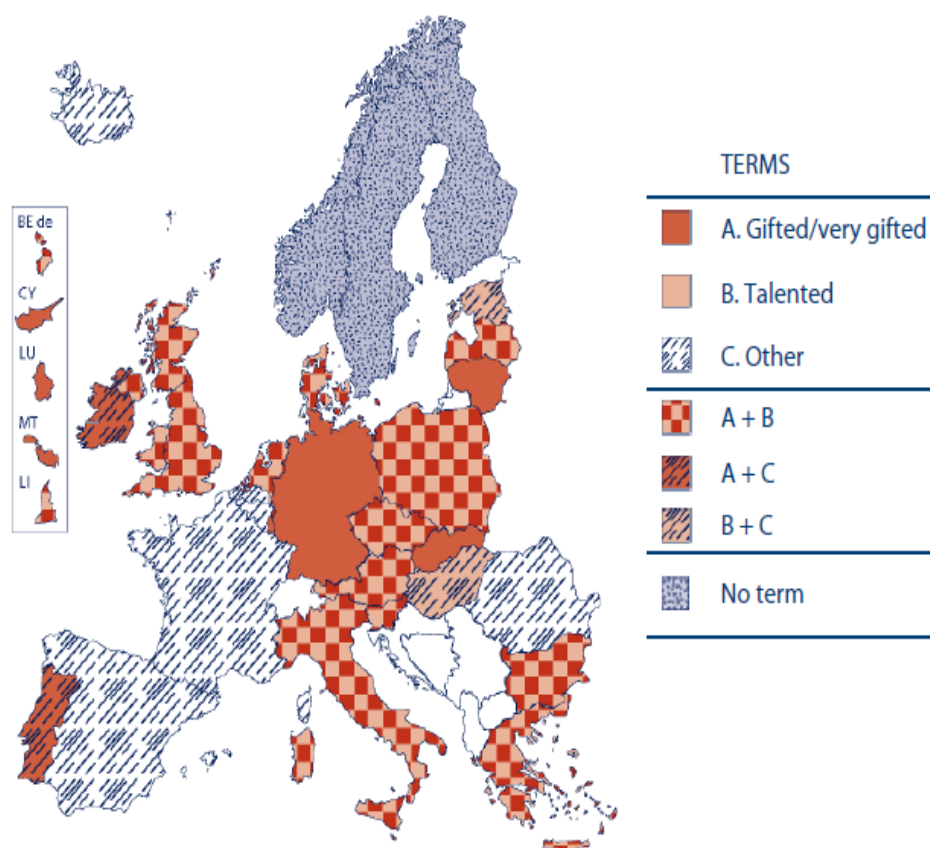
interest in the topic, and led many American researchers to do research on the topic of giftedness. A result of this was that the U.S. became one of the leading countries within gifted education research (Ibid). Thus, a lot of the literature and research within the field of high ability either is from the United States or influenced from it. The focus derived from the Marland report may also have influenced the American higher education, where many of the Universities and Teacher Colleges provide programs and courses in gifted and talented education. The professors at some of these higher education institutions have also been big contributors to research and the overall field.

2.1.2 Terminology in this research

As presented in section 1, the term high ability will be used in this thesis for the pupils that have exceptionalities or potential for exceptionalities. It is recognized that the issue of identification of pupils with high ability is one of the most debated within the field of high ability (Browne, Renzulli, Gubbins, Siegle, Zhang, & Chen, 2005). Furthermore, the identification of the pupils would entail what criterions that are used and in such, what definition one operates with will influence the identification (Ibid). Although there are many views on what a definition should entail, no commonly used official term for this group of people was found in the Norwegian context (see Figure 2.1). Without a term, it may be difficult to establish how one should define the group of people that have displayed exceptionalities or have potential for exceptionalities. Thus, a search for a suitable term for this research will be followed by a definition of what the term is considered to entail in the Norwegian context.

The investigation done to find a suitable term led to questions as to why there is a lack of official terminology in the Norwegian context. There may be several possible reasons for this. Firstly, it may indicate that this group of children is included in Norwegian schools as part of the ordinary education in a satisfactory matter. If this is the case, a lack of a term could be linked to the issue of labels or diagnoses used to prescribe educational programs to any children. The use of such labels is debated, and is often seen to stigmatize the child (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2009). In such, by not having an official term one may prevent stigmatization of children.

Figure 2.1: Official Terminology or the terms most commonly used to denote children or young people displaying exceptional potential



Source: Eurydice (2006)

Second, the lack of official terminology may point to the possibility that, exceptional potential is not acknowledged within the Norwegian educational system (Eurydice 2006). As Renzulli (2005) points out, “implicit in any efforts to define and identify the potential for gifted behaviors in young people is the assumption that we will “do something” to provide various types of specialized learning experiences that show promise of promoting the development of characteristics implicit in the definition” (p.249). Seen in relation to this, the lack of term may point to that there is no provision of such specialized learning experiences accessible for children that are seen as having exceptionalities/potential for exceptionalities. In such case, a term will be of little use.

Internationally the most commonly used terms seems to be high ability, giftedness, talented and high achievement. As pointed out by Mönks and Katzko (2005) the terms are not necessarily synonymous with each other, but can assume different meanings. Furthermore, the

issue of giftedness may be seen as a social construct (Persson 2005). This implies that what term used, and what it is considered to entail may differ from society to society. Thus, what term that is used for people with exceptionalities in Norway, and what conditions that are set for being considered as having such exceptionalities in Norway may differ from that of other countries. In such, one cannot presuppose that the term commonly used in for example the US will be suitable for the Norwegian context. In the following, the terms most commonly used internationally will be evaluated for use in the Norwegian context, as well as the reasons for the choice of the term ‘high ability’.

Gifted and Talented

As seen in section 2.1.1, the Marland- report led to the first legislative action for the people with displayed exceptionalities, which again has influenced other countries views and practices. The terms used throughout the Marland- report for this group of people are ‘gifted and talented’. A common use and separation between the terms is that “ ‘gifted’ is the term employed in an ‘intellectual’ or ‘academic’ context, whereas ‘talented’ relates more to the arts and sport” (Eurydice 2006, p.7). It seems likely that educational systems in countries influenced by the Marland report, in some cases also will make use of the terms gifted and talented. Furthermore, the associations linked to the terms may be those of views and ideas expressed through the Marland report. Due to the changes in conceptualization of the terms from society to society, one cannot presuppose that the ideas and views of the Marland report will be suitable for the Norwegian context. This is not to say that the term ‘gifted and talented’ only can be used in an American context where the Marland report was written, but rather that one cannot disregard that the terms entail more or less in terms of definitions than is suitable in the Norwegian context.

In addition, many of the countries that operate with the terms provide this group of students with ‘gifted education’, i.e. segregated education in forms of gifted programs or classes. This is the case in among other countries, the US, Germany and the Netherlands (Mönks and Katzko 2005). Thus, it is possible that the term ‘gifted and talented’ is associated with promotion of segregated measures. One may argue that such an association may be unfortunate for the Norwegian context, where values like a Unified school and inclusion are strong (see section 2.3.2).

Furthermore, the term ‘giftedness’ has historically been connected to intelligence testing- and people that score highly on such tests (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2007). Theories on intelligence have been used extensively within the field of gifted education as a way to identify people with exceptionalities (Renzulli 2005). The research and views within the field of intelligence are many, but historically individual tests of intelligence, such as the Stanford-Binet test, have been used to establish whether or not people are gifted (Woolfolk, 2001). The divide between ‘normal’ and ‘gifted’ is in such represented by a certain number on a scale. According to the theory of intelligence, a person that scores above 140 on such intelligence tests are considered as being gifted (Woolfolk, 2001). In addition to this, exceptionally gifted people are considered by the users of these tests to be people that score over 180 on these individual tests of intelligence (Woolfolk, 2001). The use of intelligence tests as a method to determine who are seen as gifted exceptionally gifted and normal has many critics. Much of the critique is directed to the problems that may occur by only measuring one type of intelligence, since there today is a widespread notion that there exist many different forms of intelligences (Renzulli 2005). Furthermore, this would suggest that a number on a scale represents what one society regards as ‘normal’. In such, normality would be the same in every society (Ibid). In addition to this, different intelligences may manifest themselves within different domains, and consequently people may be gifted in certain domains and not in others. Research has shown that there is a possibility of a bigger degree of giftedness, than what can be showed by IQ-tests (Merenheimo, 1991). Thus, intelligence tests are by some seen as an imprecise tool that may fail to detect giftedness within different domains (Winner 1996). Because of the critique of the usage of intelligence tests, researchers have proposed theories that they consider as more precise for the determination of both what giftedness may be considered to be, and who fits into the definition. However, the history of a strong link to intelligence still influences how the term giftedness is perceived and what associations that are linked to it. This has been most evident in the United States, but is also seen in other parts of the world (Borland 2005). The association of segregated measures and intelligence testing that may be connected with the terms ‘gifted and talented’ has led to the conclusion that the term is unsuitable for the Norwegian context.

High achievement

Another term used for the group of people with exceptionalities or potential for exceptionalities is ‘high achievement’. By using this term, one uses the children’s

accomplished achievements as a scale in identifying them (Freeman 2002). This would imply that one only regard children that have displayed exceptionalities within this category and furthermore, that the exceptionalities in fact are discovered. To rule out children with potential for exceptionalities at this stage could be unfortunate for the research, since little is known about the actual provision of education. As Freeman (2002), points out the potential in the individuals may be undiscovered, and it seems likely that this implies that some children do not achieve highly. Furthermore, one may assume that there exist educational systems that do not meet the needs of children with potential for exceptionalities. Even the best educational system in terms of meeting these children's needs may fail to identify and meet the needs of some children. Thus, one cannot assume that high achievement in itself will be an indicator of who these children are and this term is of that reason seen as unsuitable for this research.

High ability

When high ability is chosen as the term for this thesis, it is due to several reasons. One may argue that high ability does not say anything about the achievement of children or what education they will receive after identification. In addition, it does not say anything about what kind of exceptionality the child has. Thus, using the term high ability may lead to a more open understanding of who these children are and a result of this may be that more children receive an education adjusted to their needs and predispositions. The thought of reaching more children, through identifying and offering an education adjusted to their predispositions and abilities so that they may reach their potential is the positive aspect of the term.

Furthermore, high ability may be a more neutral word in the Norwegian context than 'gifted and talented' and 'high achievement', which- as previously argued- may be associated with educational ideas and structures different from those of the Norwegian educational system. In such, the term 'high ability' may make room for a more fruitful discussion than the other terms, since it is not overshadowed by concepts conflicting with the fundamentals of Norwegian education. Nevertheless, it may be important to recognize that the use of this term, as any other term, will represent some challenges. One of which may be how one defines the term.

2.1.3 Definition

In 1987, Hany published a research showing that there at the time of his research were over hundred definitions of giftedness (Mönks & Katzko, 2005). When taking the increased focus on the topic in the later years into consideration, it seems likely that today- 23 years later- still are many definitions of who these people may be. In addition, the choice of using ‘high ability’ in this research may cause the definitions to differ from those of giftedness (Mönks and Katzko 2005). In any case, the issue of defining the concept of high ability is a difficult task, since the definition relates to the context in which it will be used and may emphasize different elements within the field, i.e. key elements of education of the gifted or key elements of giftedness (Ibid). Nevertheless, as previously presented when introducing a new term that is not used officially a definition will be necessary in order to specify what the term entails.

Mönks, Heller, & Passow (2000) refers to Sternbergs and Davidsons understandings of giftedness, and points out that: “If the definition of giftedness is a useful one, then it can lead to favorable consequences for many children, both for society and its individuals” (p.842). In other words, what may be important rather than having extensive knowledge about the many different definitions that are given is to find a definition suited to capture the needs of the highly able children in the area where it is to be used. Thus, the definition used in this research should be one that is suitable for the Norwegian context.

Different researchers operate with different definitions of who the ‘highly able’ children are. Some researchers are liberal- such as Freeman (2002) and others- such as Renzulli (2005) are narrow in defining the group of children. Renzulli points out that “until the potential is manifested in some type of superior performance I am reluctant to say they have displayed gifted behaviors” (2005, p.248). According to this definition, one will not be considered highly able unless one has displayed exceptionalities. Seen in connection to the terminology chosen for this research, Renzulli’s definition focuses on high achievements in children and as previously pointed out; this may leave out some children.

Freeman (2002) is more liberal and extends the definition of giftedness to include individuals that have potential for exceptionalities. As Freeman sees it, the potential in the individuals may be discovered or undiscovered (Ibid). These two definitions present extremities within the field and one may argue that they both have strengths and weaknesses. Firstly, to have a strict definition of whom the highly able are might be helpful in the identification process of

highly able children. For example, exceptional accomplishments may be easier to detect than the potential for such accomplishments, since the potential rarely is measurable and may also be undiscovered. However, by leaving the potentially highly able children out of the definition one may risk that some children do not receive the support they need to turn their potential into performance. Second, a liberal definition such as given by Freeman (2002) is positive in that it may expand the conceptions of what high ability is, which may be fruitful in the Norwegian context where there seems to be little known about the topic. Nevertheless, as Renzulli (2005), points out such a wide definition may depend on subjectivity and values in measures; this again may lead to wide range for individual interpretation.

Although there are positives and negatives with both of the definitions, a liberal definition is chosen for this research. This choice is made because there is no commonly used term for this group of children in Norway, and because this research aims to contribute to further research. A definition that include both children with potential and displayed exceptionalities may serve as a useful starting place to ensure that no children are left out of the definition process. Furthermore, it may highlight that some highly able children may need educational provision in order to display exceptionalities. Thus, the definition of highly able children used in this research is liberal and influenced from Freeman (2002):

Highly able children either have a potential for exceptionalities or have displayed such exceptionalities. The potential in the child may be discovered or undiscovered.

It should be pointed out that although this definition is seen as the most suitable for this thesis, further work might be necessary in establishing whether it is the most suitable in the practical work in schools, with the goal that it should lead to the most favorable consequences for the children in Norwegian schools.

Furthermore, a liberal definition will make the issue of the magnitude of the phenomenon difficult. The question of how many children that may be considered as having high ability may be of interest for the interviewees participating in this research. As Freeman (2002) points out, this is a common question among teachers. Some researchers operate with percentages of how many highly able children there usually may be in a classroom (Ibid). The magnitude of high ability is naturally linked to the question of who is considered as having high ability (Freeman 2002). This is to say; with more aspects included in the definition, the percentage would be higher. Thus, a proposed percentage of highly able children will only be

valid within the context it is measured, since the ‘how many’ question will change accordingly to the ‘who are they’ question. For example, the criteria for high ability in Norway may differ from those in Germany and thus, the number of people considered as highly able will differ between the two countries (Freeman 2002). What is important rather than having a precise number, is the remembrance of that these children do exist in every part of the world (Ibid).

2.1.4 Educators and schools roles in work with highly able

The many researchers within the field have also contributed to differences in views on what should be educators’ role and responsibility in the meeting with highly able children. It seems obvious that the contexts in which the educators work will have an impact on what the role of the educators is considered to be. Internationally there seems to be a consensus among researchers on the unfortunate consequences of not meeting these children’s needs through education (Montgomery 2009). In some cases highly able children underachieve, which is the term “used when estimated potential of individuals is not realized in their achievements” (Montgomery 2009, p. 3). Underachievement (UAch) may be linked with motivation, which may be defined as the will to learn (Ekberg and Holmberg 2004). If things learned are perceived as meaningful, one often experience motivation (Ibid). Highly able children that do not receive an education adjusted to their abilities and predispositions may perceive the things they learn as insignificant to them and in such they may not experience motivation.

Montgomery (2009) points out that the teachers are the “prime source of motivation for pupils in classrooms, providing interest, enthusiasm, positive feedback and feed forward in assessment for learning (...)” (, p. 9). If the teacher fails to motivate the highly able children in the classroom, it may lead to UAch, which again may lead to serious and unfortunate consequences (Ibid). Among the most serious consequences are depression and problem behaviors (Montgomery 2009). The issue of motivating the children in the classroom is in such seen as a way to prevent underachievement. The idea of early intervention is also pointed out as important in the Norwegian context, and as Hagtvet and Horn (2004) points out there is a link between early interventions and positive development in children. The authors do not mention highly able children in particular, but it may seem likely that this is the case for all children (Hagtvet & Horn, 2004). In case of development of problem behaviors, the child’s abilities and potential may be covered up (Ibid). Furthermore, misinterpreted problem

behavior may result in allocation of resources in order to provide an education that seems suitable for the child, but that in fact does not meet his/her needs at all. Moreover, since there is found that the characteristics of highly able children in many ways are similar to those of ADHD, it seems likely that such misinterpretations are easily made (Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004). Although there may be several different views on the exact role educators may have in relation to highly able children, one model in particular was found interesting in this research.

The model presented in the following serves to elucidate the issue of educators' role in helping children to reach their potential and to prevent underachievement in classrooms further.

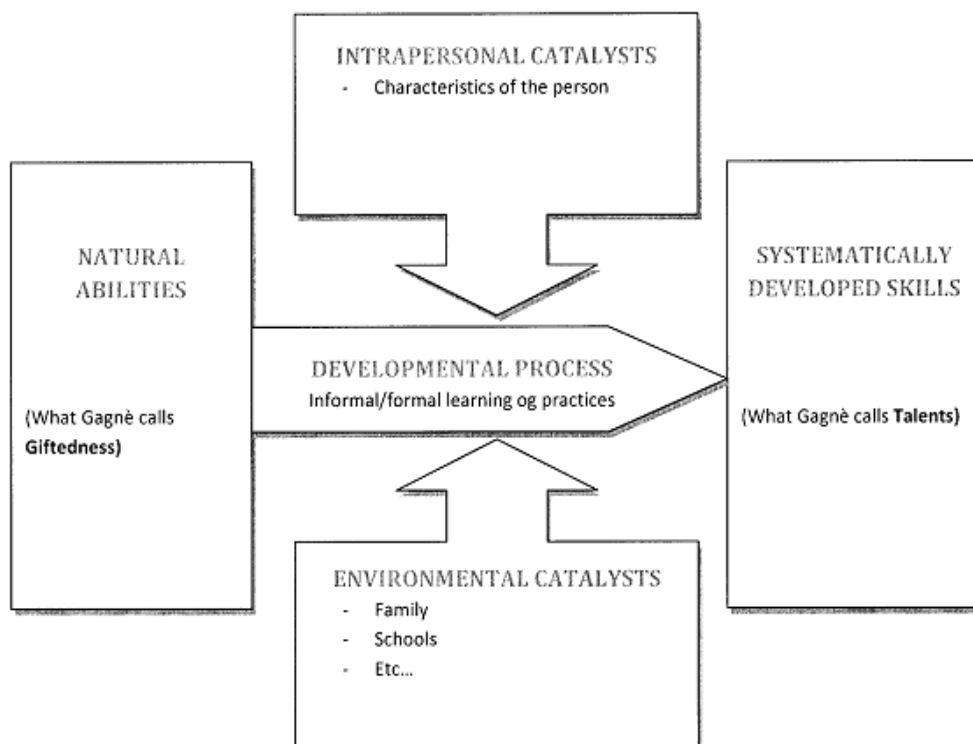


Figure 2.2 Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talented (DMGT)
(Based on Gagné (2004, 2005))

Gagné is one of the researchers that differentiate between natural abilities and systematically developed skills (2004). Being a Canadian researcher Francois Gagné operates with the terms

gifted and talented, and points to that few researchers define the terms in a satisfying matter (Ibid). Furthermore, he states that the lack of clearly defined term contribute to an incongruity within the field (Ibid). Gagnè's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and talented (DMGT) is a model that includes different factors into the development of skills in people. Furthermore, in the DMGT "the delineation between gifts and talents is a particular case of the general distinction between aptitude (or potential) and achievement" (Gagnè 2004, p. 122). Hence, giftedness is understood as the potential in the individual, and talent as the achievement or developed skills. The original DMGT consist of many factors, some of which are seen as irrelevant for this research. Thus, a simplified model is presented in the following since it is thought to show the relevance education and schools have for the development of these children.

As seen through the simplified DMGT model different factors contribute to development of a child's skills. The catalysts for development are both internal and external, where the internal are characteristics of the person- such as motivation, physical health and personality (Gagnè 2004). The environmental catalysts are the milieu around the child, such as family and school (Ibid). Nevertheless, the intrapersonal and the environmental catalyst may be seen to influence on each other, i.e. teachers in school (environmental) may influence on a child's motivation, and motivation (Intrapersonal) may influence the education given to the child. In such, the education given to the children may be seen as crucial factor in the development of skills since education may reinforce both of these catalysts further.

Although Gagnè operates with the terms gifted and talented that as previously pointed out are unsuited for the Norwegian context, the principles of the DMGT model may be useful in the Norwegian context. The view that abilities need to develop into skills through the influence of several factors, is something that may be seen as universal and useful within different contexts i.e. within the educational system as a way to emphasize the importance of appropriately Adjusted Education. Furthermore, when education is seen as a catalyst in the development of skills it shows that highly able children need education in order to develop. In such, highly able children cannot alone be responsible for their own development.

Through this section (2.1) there has been given an insight into several issues that are connected to highly able children. The topic of high ability has been seen in a historical context, and explanations in terms of why the terminology and definitions are chosen for this

research are given. In addition, there is given an understanding as presented by Gagne´(2004), as to what roles educators highly able children may have in relation to highly able children.

What becomes interesting in relation to this is to see what characterizes the Norwegian educational system. Thus, the following section (2.2) will present a historical understanding of the Norwegian educational system, what the fundamental ideas and challenges of today within the system seems to be.

2.2 The Norwegian Educational System

One may argue that the Norwegian educational system- how it is organized and what goals set through written documents make the conditions for what higher education institutions regard as important to incorporate in the education. The higher education programs- notably special pedagogy and teacher training education is thought to give enrolled students knowledge about how they should operate within the educational system, including what roles they are expected to have. As Renzulli (2005) points out, “in applied field of study, theory is not of much value unless it can give relatively specific direction to the persons ultimately responsible for putting theory into practice” (p.247). This implies that the theory of high ability has little value unless it is seen in relation with the context in which it is to be used. Furthermore, one may say that the context of which the higher education alumni’s are thought to operate in, contribute to the literature used, lectures and goals at the higher education institutions. Thus, an in-depth understanding of the Norwegian educational system is necessary to understand on which grounds high ability exists in the Norwegian context, as well as to create an understanding of the foundation on which higher educational programs are built.

The history of the Norwegian educational system is important in the understanding of today’s context. The ideas and goals of today’s educational system may be results of the country’s history. Thus, a description of different influences on the educational system will be presented. Since a lot of the educational history may become evident through the Curriculums, the different curriculums will serve as a way to systematize the historical events. The emphasis will be on the present Curriculum (LK-06), due to the relevance of this in the present Norwegian context. Other influences on the educational system will be seen in

relation to fundamental ideas of education and the educational reform 'Kunnskapsløftet' that LK-06 is a part of.

2.2.1 The history of Norwegian education

Norway was a part of Denmark from 1389- 1814 (Welle- Strand and Tjeldvoll 2002). When the Norwegian Education Act of 1739 came, it was a consequence of the needs of Lutheran Church and the King of Denmark's need for political socialization (Ibid). The goal was to create a school for everyone (alle og enhver) however, the schools were not a permanent institution across the country before over 100 years later (Askildt & Johnsen, 2005). After the independence from Denmark, it became important to create a school and educational system that contributed to a democratic Norway. Up until this people from rural areas received different education than the people located in the cities due to different needs of workforce and thus, education was contributing to a divide that was created and sustained in the society (Welle-Strand & Tjeldvol, 2002). The idea of a Unified School became a way of erasing this divide and in such, creating equal opportunities for all. Socialism was highly influential on the new educational policies, and the idea was that all children although differences in background should receive equal opportunities (Ibid). The idea of a unified school has been strong in Norway ever since, and the goals of reaching a school that contribute to equality in opportunity for all students have been seen as important both among educational politicians and educational government (Engelsen 2003).

In a Nordic perspective curriculum is seen as a social mandate, and through this schools are obligated to work according to given guidelines to reach given goals (Karseth and Sivesind 2009). In the period from 1890 up to today, Norway has had several different curriculums, which have been a result of the collaboration between experts in subjects, teachers and representatives from different organizations and groups in society (Ibid). However, up until 1936, when the new Education Act came, the use of the curriculums was voluntary (Engelsen 2003). Thus, the schools were not obligated to follow the curriculums in the same way that they are today. In the Educational Act of 1936, it was stated that the Ministry should create a curriculum that all municipalities had to follow.

The Curriculum of 1939: N- 39

This resulted in the Curriculums from 1939 (Normalplanene av 1939, N-39), which included two equal parts- one for the city schools and one for the rural schools (Øzerk 1999). N-39 aimed to continue towards a strengthening of the Unified School through to principles:

- 1- A minimum of requirements. This meant that there was set a standard that all children should reach in order to make a later transition to a higher level of education.
- 2- The work principle, which meant that children should work independently to find out what was the most important within certain subjects. (Øzerk 1999)

However, in the period of N-39 the views on the Unified school were influenced by a principle of segregation. Through the Education Act on Special Schools of 1959 (Lov om spesial skoler av 1959) children that did not fit into the 'ordinary schools' were to receive education in special schools (Engelsen 2003). This was seen both as a measure to remove a difficult group from the ordinary schools and in such relieve the teachers of a difficult group in schools, but also to provide the children with a suitable education.

M-74 and M-87

The new Curriculum of 1974 (M-74) came because of changes in the Educational Act and the introducing of nine years schooling (Øzerk 1999). The Educational Act of 1969 focused on pupil integration (elevintegrering), which meant that each child should receive education as close as possible to its home (Engelsen 2003). The law also stated that schools should provide children with education adjusted to their predispositions and abilities (Ibid). This meant that there was a strong individual focus, and that schools needed to adjust the education in a way that suited all the children (Ibid). In 1987, a revision of M-74 was published, Mønsterplanen av 1987 (M- 87). M-87 gave more freedom to the municipalities and schools in that they could develop their own local curriculums. However, as Øzerk (1999) points out, there was a tension between the local freedom and the common goals set in the curriculum. The local freedom contributed to a more pupil centered pedagogy that aimed to provide Adjusted Education for all children (Ibid). Moreover, in 1975 the Educational Act on Special Schools of 1959 was removed and was replaced with an emphasis on integration and Adjusted Education. Special education was moved from segregated schools and classes into 'ordinary schools' (Engelsen 2003). In addition to this, the idea of Adjusted Education was emphasized

through M-87, with a separate chapter focusing on the topic. The idea was that Adjusted Education should be a tool in the primary schools work towards providing every child with the best possible terms for development.

The term integration was in 1994 replaced with the term inclusion. This happened when representation from the Norwegian government met with participants from 91 other governments to discuss the concept of Education for All with a special emphasis on the role of inclusion in schools (UNESCO 1994). The participants signed a document known as the Salamanca- declaration. As seen through the presentation of the previous curriculums of Norway above, 'integration' meant that every child should receive education close to their home, and after the Educational Act on Special schools was removed it also meant that all children should be attending the same schools. In other words, the idea of integration may be seen as a physical integration (Engelsen 2003). The inclusive idea is understood differently, and emphasizes everyone's natural place within a community (Morken, 2006). This means that every pupil in school should have a natural place within the environment in school (Ibid). Hence, inclusion does not only point to the physical, but also the social and cultural aspect (Engelsen 2003).

In the Norwegian context, the Salamanca declaration had consequences for the views on schools and the provided education, and the idea of an inclusive school influenced the curriculums and education (Morken 2006). The declaration emphasizes a school for all, where all children no matter their abilities and predispositions receive Adjusted Education (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca- declaration includes different conditions into the principle of education for all:

“The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups” (UNESCO 1994, p.15).

This point out that inclusive education, according to the Salamanca-declaration is a term that accommodates both stronger and weaker students. Skogen (2005) points out that the term inclusion and what it entails may be difficult to understand. In addition, since a person is not included before he/she has a sense of being included, as a part of the community inclusion

may be difficult to reach, since the experiences of being included may be influenced by multiple factors (Morken 2006).

L-97

When a new curriculum was published in 1997 (the L- 97), it was among other things, influenced by the idea of inclusion (Engelsen 2003). The ideas of a Unified School was still important, as a way to contribute to - equal quality of education across the country - a decrease in social differences, common views, values, skills and experiences – preparation of later stages of life, in terms of further education and future participants in society (Engelsen 2003). Through the L-97, there is also a strong focus on Adjusted Education. As Engelsen (2003) points out, this was to include recognition of differences in children attending school. In addition, as stated in the L-97, all pupils- including both the ones with special needs and those with special abilities should get education adjusted to their predispositions (Engelsen 2003). Through this, pupils should get opportunities of an equal education (Ibid). The L-97 is by some seen as having a dual and conflicting agenda since it may be difficult to reach both the goals of individual adjustment and inclusion in the community. It is important to point out that the Unified school still is a part of the curriculum L-97, and that being included as a part of the community is seen as important (Engelsen 2003). This may be seen as conflicting with the idea of individual Adjusted Education for all children. In addition, in L-97 there is a part called the core curriculum (Øzerk 1999). The core curriculum (KUF, 1997) consists of six different dimensions of the human being, and explains how education can contribute within these dimensions.

In 1998, the idea of Adjusted Education was legislated through the Education Act of 1998 (opplæringsloven). Through this, Adjusted Education became an overall principle for all education, and warranted through the Educational Acts §1-3 (Opplæringsloven). Furthermore, special needs education was included in the Educational Acts § 5-1 as a way to organize the education for those who do not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education (Ibid).

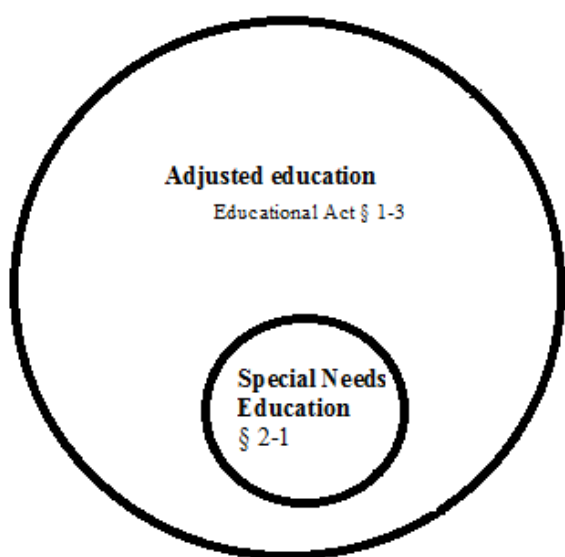
To adjust the education to best fit all pupils in a classroom may be a difficult task, since this would mean that all pupils no matter if they have high ability or difficulties should receive education adjusted to their level. The teacher has a great responsibility in this, and needs to identify the level of each student to be able to provide individually Adjusted Education (Ekeberg and Holmberg 2004). Ideally, this should happen within the ordinary education, but

in some cases segregated special need measures have to be made. The children who do not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education in the classroom, have a right to receive special needs education (Opplæringsloven § 5-1).

Nilsen (2004) provides an understanding of the relationship between Adjusted Education and special needs education through a figure, here presented in figure 2.3. As seen in the figure, special needs education is provided within the frame of Adjusted Education, in other words as a way to organize Adjusted Education. Furthermore, it seems that the needs children have, notably individual or special needs, indicate if they should receive Adjusted Education as special needs education or not (Nilsen 2004). More on what 'special needs' are considered to be and whether highly able children are seen to have such 'special needs' will be treated in section 5.1.

Figure 2.3: Relationship between Adjusted- and Special needs Education

Source: Nilsen (2004), p.441.



In 1998, the ideas of Adjusted Education and special needs education were warranted through the Educational Act and with this a bigger coverage in the following Curriculum followed.

Today's Context

In 2006, the implementation of a new Educational reform- Kunnskapsløftet, began. A new curriculum called the LK-06 (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006) was a part of the reform (Dale 2009). The core curriculum (KUF, 1997) remained unchanged from L-97, but added to LK-06 was the Quality Framework (*prinsipper for opplæringen*) (Udir, 2006). As Karseth and

Engelsen (2007) points out, this chapter emphasizes on the difference between likeness and equality, and points out that both children that are eager to learn and unmotivated children should have a place in school. To reach this, different children should not necessary receive the same education. Thus, the education should not be equal but rather provide equal opportunities to children (Ibid).

Furthermore, Adjusted Education is through the LK-06 emphasized more than in previous curriculums (Dalhaug & Nes, 2007). Moreover, as Haug (2004) points out, Adjusted Education is still seen as a condition for inclusive schools. As previously pointed out, the term has a long history within the Norwegian educational system. Nevertheless, what the term is seen to entail is by no means clear (Ibid). This is to say that different people and forces within education understand Adjusted Education differently (Nordahl 2009). Figure 2.2 points out a significant difference between the different approaches to Adjusted Education. In such, different interpretations may have different consequences for the educational practice. As seen from the figure, differences between a wide and narrow approach to Adjusted Education may lead to differences in educational practice when it comes to degrees of individualization of the education, and views on the learning environment.

Figure 2.4 Approaches to Adjusted education

NARROW APPROACH TO ADJUSTED EDUCATION	WIDE APPROACH TO ADJUSTED EDUCATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized education; Individual plans, learning styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on subject inclusion in learning processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation in terms of level; Segregation, special education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social participation for all children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the individual pupil when problems in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on collective approaches as well as individual adjustment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on internal motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a school environment based on cooperation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on the individual before the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils difficulties is seen a larger contextual context
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on both internal and external motivation

Source: Nordahl (2009) - To English by author

As previously mentioned, the children that do not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education may receive Adjusted Education through special needs education (Opplæringsloven). Bachmann & Haug (2006) strengthen this by pointing out that special

needs education is seen as a way to organize Adjusted Education, and in such the research on special needs education will have relevance for how Adjusted Education is understood.

Furthermore, LK-06 elaborates on Adjusted Education, saying that this is something that all children should get in school- and point specifically to both children with learning difficulties and special abilities within different fields (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). Hence, knowledge about the terms 'Adjusted Education' and 'special needs education', and the understanding of them is important in the work of both special educationalists and teachers (Backhmann & Haug, 2006). In addition, the LK-06 gives little specific information on what methods that should be used within the different subjects or what the children should know other than general skills they should develop (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). To apply the curriculum in the educational practice does in such call out for a great deal of professionalism in the educators (Dalhaug & Nes, 2007).

Firstly, teachers will need both sufficient subject knowledge and pedagogy skills in order to teach within their subject and to use appropriate methods (Skogen, 2005). Second, teachers need to be able to see which children that do not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education (Ibid). In relation to seeing who does not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education, Skogen points out that knowledge within the field of special pedagogy should be transmitted to teachers (2005). This may improve teachers' possibilities to work towards Adjusted Education through the ordinary education and thus, fewer pupils may be of need of special needs education (Ibid).

When taken into consideration that the main users of the Norwegian schools are the pupils, collaboration across professions may be beneficial for the primary users. In such, the competence will increase within all fields of education (Ibid). This also calls out for an extensive knowledge in the special pedagogy field- since an in depth understanding of different marginalized groups is needed in order to meet the needs of children in these groups (Skogen 2005).

Educational challenges of today

The Norwegian educational system has through recent years been an object of focus. As seen through the history of the educational system, the quantitative aspect of education, meaning access to education for all children is fulfilled (Engelsen 2003). All children in Norway have access to school, and are enrolled in school because of the education duty (skoleplikten). The

challenges of the Norwegian educational system have in such switched from the quantity aspect, to the quality aspect (Engelsen, 2003). In other words, the focus has gone from focusing on moving all children into schools and inclusive classrooms, to focus more on the content of education and the quality of it. However, quality of education is a relative and philosophical concept that may be difficult to measure (Green, 1994). Nonetheless, it seems like the idea of Adjusted Education for all children was seen as a plausible link to that children in Norway reached their potential and hence that the quality of education was at satisfying level. The quality of the Norwegian educational system has however been challenged by results on international tests such as the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA).

The PISA study is a “triennial survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds” (OECD 2007, p. 1), is organized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and aims to develop valid comparisons between the participating countries. The Pisa- study was first held in the year 2000. The areas that are being researched are science, reading skills and mathematics, and the results are presented in mean scores for each country (OECD, 2007).

As pointed out, an assumption on Norway’s quality of education may be influenced by the country’s focus on Adjusted Education, which ideally should help pupils in reaching their potential. If this was the case, one might assume that the quality of Norwegian education was good, and hence that the Pisa- results would point in similar direction. However, the Pisa- results from all the previous years have revealed that Norway’s score has been average compared to the other participating countries (OECD, 2007). Furthermore, Norway has a bigger than average standard deviation among the pupils of the participating countries in the PISA- study, and such a difference between the weakest and the strongest pupils may have several implications for the educational system (OECD 2007). The issue of Norway’s average results on the Pisa study, and the big standard deviation among pupils led to concerns that became evident both in the general society and media, and among educational politicians. Trough this a question that has been important through the history of the Unified school; how one can combine a Unified School and still focus on the uniqueness of each individual, became even more relevant (Engelsen 2003). The question also dealt with whether Adjusted Education in fact contributes to children reaching their potential. Moreover, the long lasting efforts of erasing social differences through education have been questioned, due to the

revealed standard deviation between students. In such, the Pisa study has drawn attention to the quality of Norwegian education.

In addition to the Norwegian results on the Pisa- study, different research reports have pointed to alarming issues of the educational system. An OECD-report on the Norwegian context points to both strengths and weaknesses within the educational system (Mortimer, 2004). For example, it is pointed out that although the Norwegian 15 year olds results are average on the Pisa- study, tests done in 2003 point to that Norway is “the world leaders in measures of adult literacy” (Ibid, p. 5). Hence, changes should build on the strengths to preserve the positive outcomes of education in adulthood and in such, preserve and strengthen the equity in society. The need for change pointed out through the report is based on the above average standard deviation between students that is seen linked to a school with many underachievers. Furthermore, a big degree of underachievement in school is seen to exist due to a predominant school culture of under- challenge (Ibid). This is to say that the challenges children meet in school are too low. When seen in relation to the emphasis Norway has had on Adjusted Education, it seems that the goal of providing all children with education adjusted to their predisposition and needs and in such, providing them with something to strive for has failed (Dalhaug & Nes, 2007). To prevent such underachievement in schools, development of benchmarks is recommended and it is suggested that, “research is undertaken into ways of supporting the early learning of disadvantaged pupils in danger of underachieving” (Mortimer, 2004, p. 52). The report does not state who these disadvantaged pupils in danger of underachievement may be, but points out that any changes to the educational system should build on Norway’s culture and traditions (Ibid).

The new knowledge acquired through the Pisa results has also contributed to discussions and written reports within Norway. When seen in relation to the role education plays in provision of future societal and economical benefits for a society, representative from different societal areas entered the debate. Through the report “The road to a knowledge society – Challenges for the Norwegian education system” (Veien til kunnskapslandet. Utfordringer for det norske utdanningssystemet), funded by the Norwegian Trade Organization (NHO) and published by Society and Business Research AS (SNL) in 2008, the PISA results are also seen as indications of an educational system that is not well functioning (Salvanes, Møen, Hægeland, Raaum, & Bjorvatn, 2008).

The report stresses the need of strengthening Norway's capacity for technology, and with this point to the need of knowledge capital in the Norwegian context (Ibid). Lystras and Sicilia (2005) describe a knowledge society, as a society where "the final milestone is a society with access to knowledge and learning for everyone" (p. 4). In addition, the way to reach this is to focus on well known knowledge and schools to contribute to emerging technologies which again will benefit the society socially and economically (Ibid). In other words, knowledge among people in the society (knowledge capital) is seen as important in reaching these benefits for the future of societies (knowledge society). Within the globalization age -here understood as internationalization, which "refers to a growth of transactions and interdependence between countries (...) where more messages, ideas, merchandise, money, investments and people cross borders between national-state-territorial units" (Scholte 2002, p.8)- it is created a foundation for comparisons and competition between countries. To improve the educational system so that Norway is capable of competing in the globalized world is by Salvanes, Møen, Hægeland, Raaum, & Bjorvatn (2008), pointed out as one of the biggest challenges Norway faces today. It is pointed out that by investing in knowledge capital- through improved education- Norway could contribute to economical growth and prosperity that in the future will affect both the society as well as the individual (Ibid).

Furthermore, the report brings up the issue of high-school drop- outs in the Norwegian educational context (Ibid). The issue of high- school drop- outs may not be specifically relevant for this research since the focus is on the primary school level. However, through the Nova report 12/2010, primary and secondary schooling is seen to have potential in reducing the drop- out rates by emphasizing on pupils will to learn (Wollscheid, 2010). This points out that an improved primary education may be beneficial for the future schooling. The issue receives much attention in Norway at the time and efforts are put into discovering what causes it and how it may be improved (Ibid). It may be difficult to connect the issue of high ability to the drop- out rates, since there is found no research on such relationship. However, to increase the focus on unmotivated pupils with special needs is through the NOVA report seen as a possible way to decrease the drop- out rates (Wollscheid, 2010). Although there is no research found to elucidate this issue, one may raise the question of whether this may apply for highly able students that underachieve in primary schools, when taken into consideration what unfortunate consequences this may have for their motivation and performance in school.

Through this (section 2.2), it has been given an understanding of the Norwegian educational history. Through this, it has become clear that the educational ideas present today may have to be seen in connection with the history. Example of this is seen to be Adjusted Education and the Unified School that are terms that came to life in different educational contexts than the one today. Adjusted Education was through previous chapter seen to be a term that creates room for interpretation, and that may be approached differently. A wide or narrow approach to Adjusted Education is as seen by Nordahl's (2009) (table 2.4) considered to lead to different organization of the education, due to that each approach may have a different degree of individualization (Nordahl 2009).

In the following, what role the educators (here seen as teachers and special educationalists) may have within the Norwegian educational system will be treated.

2.3 The role of teachers and special educationalists

Karseth and Sivesind (2009) points out that the mandate of education is to meet the conditions and goals set through the Educational Act and the Curriculum. This is to say that educators in school should have in- depth knowledge about these goals and how to reach them. Although there is no authoritative and legislated definition of what the mandate of education is, researchers have different views on how one may look upon it. For this research, the Curriculum LK-06, the Educational Act of 1998 and Whitepapers on education are considered to set the mandate of education, although it is recognized that there may be other influencing factors on the matter. In such, the schools and the professionals working within the schools are obligated to follow the present curriculum, the legislated laws of the Educational Act, as well as the Whitepapers that elaborate on educational ideas. The role the educators are expected to play through this will most likely influence the organizing and content of higher educational programs that educate future special educators and teachers. Hence, the goals and methods made evident through these documents are seen to make the basis for what the higher educational programs educating teachers and special educationalists should entail. As previously pointed out, the primary users of schools are the pupils (Skogen 2005). To best meet the needs of the primary user's collaboration between professions may be necessary. Bachmann & Haug (2006) strengthen this view by pointing to the importance of knowledge of the special needs education field in the understanding of Adjusted Education. It seems

likely that special needs education also will be understood best with knowledge of Adjusted Education in general.

In such, the roles of special educationalists and teachers may be overlapping and in some cases difficult to separate. However, in the following the two roles will be separated to make a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each of them. Furthermore, such a division may be useful in creating a link between the roles and the provision on the higher educational programs investigated.

2.3.1 The teacher role

The Norwegian teacher education and the role of the teacher has been the object of focus in Norway, much due to the previously presented challenges of the educational system of today (see section 2.3.2). The context, in which the international tests, such as the Pisa study operate, creates an international framework for what competences and standards that are set (Karseth and Sivesind 2006). In such, globalization also influences the teacher education (Ibid). With a change in competences and standards for the learning of pupils, comes a change in roles and responsibilities of the teachers. In addition, as pointed out through Whitepaper no. 11, 2008-2009 today's education calls out for follow-up of pupils and Adjusted Education at an early stage (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009).

Through the Whitepaper no. 11 (2008-2009) the teacher role is seen as influenced by the expectations and goals set through written documents on education and the general society (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009). It is pointed out that these regulations give flexibility to the individual teachers, in terms what actions to make. Moreover, many situations that today's teachers meet will benefit from cooperation with others within or outside of schools to meet the best decisions for the children (Ibid). The LK-06 emphasizes competences and output of education more heavily than previous curriculums, and in such the expectations to teachers is broader than before (Ibid). The flexibility teachers have gives room for interpretation of the laws and other written documents on education. Nevertheless, the fact is that LK-06 has strengthened the focus on Adjusted Education, and that the Whitepaper no. 11 (2008-2009) focuses on the importance of early and Adjusted Education. This calls for teachers that are well familiarized with children's development (Gloppen, Bern, & Sivertsen, 2009). Thus, knowledge of development of different groups of children will be necessary to enable teachers to meet the needs of different pupils, and in such provide them with Adjusted Education.

Legally, the teacher education is through the Higher Education Act bound to follow the Educational Act, the Curriculum and other written documents that exists on education. Furthermore, a framework for the teacher education is guiding the content and structure of the different educational programs for teachers (Nokut, 2006). Through the framework given for the higher teacher education programs, it is pointed out that the students should learn about the academic knowledge they will need to teach subjects, the pedagogy to teach these subjects as well as an understanding of the connection between different actors within the educational system (UFD, 2003). As seen through the Nokut (2006) report, there have been many changes in the framework of teacher education, and through this report it is questioned whether the changes come too rapidly. The concern is that the wanted changes in teacher roles not will implemented when current students enter the workforce.

The aims of the higher educational program: Teacher Education

With the Whitepaper no.11 (2008-2009) a new structure of the teacher education was introduced. The new organization of the education was to be implemented at the autumn semester 2010, and hence at written time for this thesis, the new structure of the educational program has just started. The new structure is based on a division between the students that after completed education will work on levels 1-7, and level 5.-10 (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009). The goal of the reorganization is to provide future teachers with more subject knowledge, as well as knowledge of children's' development. A more generalized but also specialized knowledge is needed to provide the children with the best possible adjustment of education (Ibid). When applying for teacher education, the student will need to decide what levels he/she wants to work within after ended education (Ibid). In common for both the directions is that the students are demanded to have 100 days of educational practice during the four-year course of the study

When searching through the website of the University College investigated in this research, it was found that a new subject was introduced with the new structure and that it is common for both of the educations programs (Level 1-7 and 5-10). The subject is called 'pedagogy and pupil knowledge', and may seem to strengthen the aims of the teacher education that is found on the website, notably to prepare students to use different methods in their future educational practice, and through this adjust the education based upon individual abilities and predispositions. Through this, one can see a link between the role and responsibilities a

teacher is seen to have through the written policy documents on education, and the actual provision through the higher educational program.

In the fourth study year, students chose their own optional-course. One of the possible optional courses relates to the issue of Adjusted Education and special pedagogical competencies in school. The third informant is connected to this optional course. This means that the foundation is the same as within the general teacher education, and in such that the course is shorter than the other two investigated. The course is on 60 study points and is organized as four modules. In some ways, the course may be interesting since, as the title of it sum up it sums up the two educational ideas of Adjusted Education and special needs education and provide a link between them. What is covered through this optional course may serve, as a supplement to the general teacher education program- and in such, there may be additional focus on the highly able children given on this course. Nevertheless, this would then be the case only for the students that choose to do this course. In addition to this, there are differences in terms of how many weeks of practice there is at each higher education program.

2.3.2 The role of special educationalist

As Skogen (2005) points out, special pedagogy and special needs education are not synonymous terms. Whereas special pedagogy may be defined as a discipline of knowledge about the educational needs of different marginalized groups, special needs education is a more specific term that points to the specific educational measure (Skogen 2005). Special needs education is initiated when children are considered not getting a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education (opplæringsloven). Subsequently, one can look at special pedagogy as the overall field of research that aims to provide information on different marginalized groups (Askildt & Johnsen 2004). Furthermore, as Skogen (2005) points out- the more marginalized the group is- the more important it is to possess knowledge about the group to prevent discrimination. Thus, what role special educationalists has will depend on their workplace- if it is connected directly to provision of special needs education or not.

From Skogen (2005) one can derive two different tasks of special pedagogy:

- 1) to work directly with special education of children (either in organizing or conducting the special education)

2) to contribute to knowledge through research and broadened information to all fields of educators. (Through this special educationalists can contribute to knowledge spreading in schools, through this contribute to Adjusted Education without special educational measures).

This research focuses on the primary level of education and on what knowledge teachers and special educationalists have acquired about highly able children through their higher education. A focus on only the special educationalists that work specifically with special needs education may be unfortunate, since it may leave out the value of a special pedagogy field that serves as a knowledge base. In addition, as previously pointed out, the knowledge that is found within the field of special pedagogy may contribute to an increased knowledge among teachers- and in such help people to reach Adjusted Education for children within the ordinary education (Wollscheid, 2010).

Thus, the role of special educationalists in this research considers both the work directly with special needs education, and the work that contributes to knowledge about marginalized groups in society. This would imply that the higher educational program of special pedagogy should prepare the students for the responsibilities that come with both of these roles. Knowledge of both of the roles of the field may be considered important; even if it is not certain that, the alumni's of the educational program will work within both of these roles.

The higher education program: Special pedagogy

The special pedagogy program is on the website of the investigated University described as providing general knowledge on learning and development, and specific knowledge on people with special needs. Furthermore, the study program aims to give insight on humans as individuals but also on the bigger picture in which the individuals exist. In this, the issues of normality, divergence and motivation are important. The program aims to prepare students for future work with marginalized groups, including people with learning disabilities and different disabilities.

Through this, one may point out that both of the points on what special pedagogy entails, as presented by Skogen (2005), are included in the educational program. The knowledge on marginalized groups may be what is referred to as specific knowledge on people with special needs. The information found on the websites does not go into detail about the program.

The bachelor program consists of 180 study points over three years, in which the students are obligated to follow all the given courses. This implies that there is little freedom as to what courses one wish to attend as a student, all though one does not have to attend all lectures given to pass the program. Through the program, it is demanded that students have 10 weeks of practice, divided over the two last years of the study. The most common places for the practice are schools and kindergartens; however, practice at other institutions where special pedagogical expertise is needed may also occur.

Through this section (2.3) it is pointed out what roles alumni's from the two programs may have. It is pointed to how the roles may be viewed and there is given an overview of the two educational programs that are objects of investigation in this research.

2.4 The Norwegian focus on High Ability

To find information on the topic of high ability in the Norwegian context, a literature search in libraries as well as in several journals has been undertaken. In this, relevant journal databases was seen to be: - Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, High Ability studies, the Gifted Quarterly, idunn.no (Norwegian Journal database) and Journal of Educational policy. A search for literature on the topic of 'high ability' on the University of Oslo Library resulted in some hits- all about highly able children in the international context. By extending the search to the terms 'gifted and talented' and 'high achievement', more literature was found. However, this literature was also dealing with high ability in the context of other countries, and not the Norwegian. That said, when the search was extended and conducted on the Norwegian terms 'barn med særlige evner', 'begavede barn' and 'evnerike barn', some previously conducted research from the Norwegian context was found. In the following, a brief introduction to the aims and findings of these researchers will be presented. It may also be of value to put the aims and findings into a historical perspective. Subsequently, the context in which the research was conducted may have influenced both on the researchers interest in the topic, and the findings.

Due to the focus of this research, being on high ability in the Norwegian context and the fact that little information was found on this specifically- sources of the education system in general needed to be investigated. This led to findings on highly able, of both direct and indirect character. The indirect findings found in media and literature may be seen as

revealing interesting views on the topic of high ability in the Norwegian context and will of that reason be presented.

2.4.1 Previous Research

In 1970, Arnold Hofset published his doctoral thesis on children with high ability in Norwegian schools ('evnerike barn'). Hofset's dissertation seems to be focusing on the Norwegian educational system and its basic theoretical idea of equal opportunities for all. It may be of interest see the research in the historical context in which it was conducted. As presented in the history chapter (section 2.3.1) the Educational Act on Special Schools was a valid until 1975, which means that Hofset's research on ordinary, education did not include children with special educational needs (SEN). In other words, children with SEN were receiving education in segregated schools or classes. Hence, the ordinary classroom education that Hofset (1970) based his research on may be seen as more homogenous than the classrooms of today. This is to say that the idea of inclusion that is strong in today's school brings more children with different needs and abilities into the same classroom. Subsequently, when Hofset through his doctoral thesis promote his view of that 'education for all' should include both children with SEN and high ability- children with SEN are not part of the ordinary education but receive education as segregated measure. With this as a starting point Hofset (1970) starts an investigation of how the Norwegian education in practice is adjusted to the needs of the highly able. Hofset found that there seemed to be little room for highly able children in the Norwegian classrooms and points out that this should be a focus in the future (Ibid). The fact that it was published in 1970 points to an early interest in the field of high ability, and in such it may be important in the historical aspect of high ability in Norway. Although the educational context may be different today, it may still be seen as relevant.

Furthermore, a search in the Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research led to some results on the Norwegian context of gifted education. In 1971, Arnold Hofset published a pilot study on whether gifted students in class affected the attitudes and achievements of the rest of the class. The study included 168 pupils from the third, fifth and seventh level, which all attended schools in the same Norwegian municipality (Hofset 1971). Groups were organized with either 0-1 gifted students, or 4 or more gifted students in the groups. The scale that was used to determine giftedness was tests measuring the mental age of the students. After testing all the children from the different classes, he concluded that there were no significant

differences in the attitudes and achievements between the classes with 0-1 and 4 or more gifted students. Thus, his conclusion was that the data collected "... do not provide any substantial support to the statement that gifted pupils have an inspiring effect on their classes" (Hofset 1971, p. 148). The findings are interesting, but in the same way as Hofset's doctoral thesis, the educational framework today is different than it was nearly 40 years ago- when this research was conducted. Furthermore, international findings from recent years conflict with Hofset's conclusion, i.e. Freeman and Josepsson (2002) that state that research has shown that it..."is a positive spin-off from gifted education". This is to say that the overall education improves in schools where gifted education is provided. Although the idea of gifted educational programs is seen to collide with the Norwegian fundamental ideas, one may argue that such a positive spin-off effect could be evident in a Norwegian ordinary classroom as well.

Other than this research by Arnold Hofset, the researcher could find no published research or articles regarding high ability in the Norwegian context on levels higher than the master level. These master theses may point to a growing interest in the topic of high ability among students. Furthermore, the fact that the theses found are written within as different fields as law, sociology, comparative education and general education might be seen to point out that students within several academic fields call out for increased focus and more knowledge on this group of children. Although little literature was found on the Norwegian context in particular, it should be pointed out that research from other countries might be seen as useful although they are from other educational contexts.

Roland S. Persson has conducted research on Swedish teachers and the coverage of high ability in an egalitarian context. The Scandinavian societies, including the Norwegian, are in many cases considered to be based on the egalitarian ethos (Persson 1998). In schools this has meant that "the highest level of achievement was set—beyond which no one was encouraged to reach" (Persson 1998, p.183). One effect of the egalitarian school may then be that the children that have the possibility to reach higher levels are not encouraged to reach these higher levels. Persson (1998) emphasize the importance teachers have in the development of children with high ability, and through his research, he investigates how "teachers in an egalitarian school system, with neither specific knowledge nor guidelines, conceptualize and make provision for highly able pupils?" (p.181). The research found that teachers often operate with stereotypes in the identification of highly able children, which again makes the

foundation for the provision given through education. Furthermore, Persson (1998) points out that research is needed to investigate further, what consequences such stereotypes might have for children in the ordinary classroom.

2.4.2 Influences on the Norwegian focus

Although there seems to be little research and literature on the topic of high ability in the Norwegian context, other sources may have influenced on the views on high ability. These sources range from book releases, interest groups, newspaper articles etc. In addition to this, there exists many websites or web-discussions where caregivers of highly able or highly able people themselves give their stories. Although these sources may not have a strict scientific value, they may be important in establishing how people that either are highly able or care for highly able experience and view the educational system.

In 2007, the ‘Association Happy Children- network for parents with highly able children’ was established. The association works to help highly able children in developing self-esteem and best possible realization of ability, through providing parents with information and a network where experiences and advice can be shared (Foreningen for Lykkelige Barn, 2007). In addition, the children are given a network where they can meet children that are also highly able. To become a member of the association, either the child needs to have gone through tests to confirm that he/she is highly able, or the parents need to have gone through a screening test done by a qualified screener (Ibid).

The Association Happy children have initiated many of the web discussions and debates that are found online today (Aftenposten 2008). Through these debates parents, educators and adults with high ability share their experiences of high ability in the Norwegian context (ibid). The different cases vary, and there are many different experiences shared through such web-debates. However, a large amount of the experiences shared concerns the quality of education given to highly able children. Parents and others describe their experiences with a school system that is not meeting their children’s needs, and express a concern for the future development of their children.

On the website of Martin Ystenes and Beate Ystenes (2002), who are employees at the University of Trondheim and parents of a highly able child, quotes from people who themselves are highly able or parents of highly able are presented. Martin Ystenes has on

different occasions expressed concerns for the safeguarding of children with high ability in the Norwegian educational system. His background as a member of Mensa and as a father of a highly able child may be the reasons for such concerns. In the student newspaper at the Educational department at the University of Oslo, *Pedagogisk Profil*, Ystenes (2006) points to the difficulties that may become evident in the lives of highly able children that are not recognized as highly able. Through his interest in the field, he has gotten in contact with many people that have difficulties because of such deficient identification (Ibid). Furthermore, Ystenes has written the Norwegian preface to one of the first books in years published in Norway on the issue of high ability- *Highly able children- a guide for parents and educators* (“*Begavede barn- en veiledning for foreldre og pedagoger*”) by Mönks and Ypenburg (2008). This book received attention in the Norwegian media, and drew interest to the topic of highly able children.

After the book was published, the media gave concrete examples of children that are struggling in the Norwegian educational system, due to their high abilities (Aftenposten, 2009). In such, the focus on highly able children in the Norwegian context was strengthened. Furthermore, Skogen (2008) reviewed the book, and concluded with that it makes an important contribution in the debate of Norwegian education. Moreover, he points to that, the issue of highly able has been neglected in the context of Norwegian Special pedagogy. Thus, he calls for including the children with high ability in the research portfolio within special pedagogy. In such, Skogen (2008) is of the opinion that highly able children should be included in the research field of Special Pedagogy. Through this, one may assume that knowledge of the needs of this group within special pedagogy could be transmitted to teachers as well.

2.5 Chapter Summary

Through this chapter, insight is given within the two main topics of this research: High ability (2.1) and the Norwegian educational system (2.2). Due to this research's, focus on higher education institutions within teacher education special pedagogy, roles of these professions are presented in section 2.3. In section 2.4, it is given insight into how 'high ability' is and have been covered in the Norwegian context.

High ability has been seen in an international context, and it is accounted for decisions made in relation to terminology, and defining the term, as ‘children that either have a potential for exceptionalities or have displayed such exceptionalities that either are discovered or undiscovered’ (see sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). Gagné’s (2004, 2005) Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talented has been used to point out that educators may serve as catalysts in the work with highly able children (see figure 2.2). In relation to this figure, how teachers may prevent underachievement and to help highly able children to reach their potential through being catalysts in the education is treated through section 2.1.4.

By looking into the history of the Norwegian educational system, it was shown that the Norway has an inclusive Unified school, based on that all children should have equal opportunities. It is pointed to that Adjusted Education have been important in this for many years, and that today Special Needs Education is seen as a way to organize Adjusted Education (see section 2.2.2). Table 2.4 presents two different approaches to Adjusted Education, as Nordahl (2009) sees it, and each approach is likely to influence on education.

The focus on the higher education institutions is focused on roles of alumni’s from teacher education and special pedagogy programs, retrieved from both overall literature and the online information found from each of the higher education institutions (2.3). Additionally, it is pointed to found research on highly able in the Norwegian context and what may be viewed as influences on the field of high ability was presented (2.4).

3 Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and methodological considerations of this research as well as components in the study design: Sampling, data- collection, analysis of data, ethical consideration and verification issues. The aim of this research has been to explore issues within a field that seems to have received little attention in the Norwegian context. More specifically the aim is to contribute to the field of high ability research, to draw attention to the issue and possibly facilitate future research on the field.

3.1 Case- study design

“In the most elementary sense, the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research question and, ultimately, to its conclusion” (Yin, 2009, p.27). In such, the design of this research has been connected to the initial research question:

To what extent are the needs of children with ‘high ability’ acknowledged and focused on in two Norwegian higher education programs- Special Needs Education and Teacher Education?

For this research case study is understood according to Simons’ (2009) interpretation; As an “...approach, to indicate that case study has an overarching research intent and methodological (and political) purpose, which affects what methods are chosen to gather data” (p. 3). Thus, the case- study is not used as a method in itself, but is rather seen to affect the choice of methods in data collection and analysis. For this research, the overarching intent has been to compare two different higher educational programs in terms of acknowledgement of and focus on highly able children and their needs.

A case study design enables insight into particularities of cases, which in this research have been higher educational programs. Furthermore, a case study design is especially suitable for research where ‘how’ and ‘why’ are covered in the initial research questions (Yin, 2009). The main research question of this research deals with the issue of ‘to what extent’ the needs of highly able children are focused on and acknowledged, which may be seen as similar to the question of how the coverage is. In such, the initial research question is seen as suitable for a case- study.

As seen from the main research question presented above, there is more than one case investigated in this research. Representatives from two different higher educational programs within the field of pedagogy are investigated. As Yin (2009) points out, a case study is strengthened by including more than one case in the research, which then will be a multiple case study. Simons (2009) points out that the cases that are investigated through case study could be a system, an institution or a person. In this research the cases has been individuals that are connected to the higher educational programs through their work. The issue of sampling participants for each case and characteristics of the different cases will be elaborated on later in this chapter, notably section 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.

3.1.1 Limitations in using case study design

Yin (2009) points to that there is a common concern that there is little basis for generalization when using case- studies. However, there seems to be a difference between how generalization is made; findings can either be generalized to populations or to expand and generalize theories (Ibid). The aim of this research is as presented in section 1.3 is to contribute to attention towards highly able children in the Norwegian context which seems to have received little attention and, furthermore, possibly facilitate further research. In such, the aim is not generalize the findings of this research in terms of numerical frequencies, but rather to explore existing theories and how they are interpreted.

3.2 Qualitative Approach

Simons (2009) points out that a case study design can be built upon either a qualitative or a quantitative methodology. This is to say that different instruments of data collection and data analysis can be used. However, in research where complexities are evident in the research questions a qualitative approach may be the most suitable (Ibid). The research questions and aims of this research are thought to be of such a complex character. As seen in sections 2.1.2/ 2.1.3 there seem to be a lack of terminology and definitions in Norway for people that display exceptionalities. Of that reason, it seems likely that different stakeholders may interpret the terms differently. Within the research topic, both high ability as a concept and the educational ideas within the Norwegian context may be complex in terms of how they are understood and interpreted. In addition, there is a likelihood of that the lack of focus indicate that there may be a controversy connected to the issue of high ability. In such, the participants' experiences

and understandings of the educational context (the real world) are investigated. This points to that the research philosophy of this research has been that of a phenomenological character (Newby 2010). Phenomenology is by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) seen as describing research that aims to understand a social phenomenon by researching the participants perspectives. In order to obtain in- depth understandings of the links between the acknowledgement of the needs of highly able children and the focus within higher education programs as well as to grasp the ‘true’ perspectives of the research participants, a qualitative approach is considered most suitable for this research. In such, there has also been an inductive approach to the data collection. How the collected data was analyzed will be treated further in section 3.4.

The fact that this research is conducted as a case study through a qualitative approach has influenced on the instruments of data collection, notably document analysis and interviews.

3.2.1 Document analysis

There are three reasons as to why a document analysis was chosen as an instrument of data collection for this research. First, it seems likely that the framework that is given teachers and special educationalists through curriculum, laws, Whitepapers etc. have an impact on their thoughts and practices (Patton 2002). In such, to have knowledge of the framework was considered important in order to understand the context in which teachers and special educationalists work.

Second, it seems likely that this framework also will influence representatives from the higher education programs that educate a future work force within the educational field. Since the framework may contribute to the roles and responsibilities of different professions, it becomes important to have knowledge about these guidelines.

Third, Simons (2009) points out that document analysis is a valuable instrument in case studies, as a way to “enrich the context and contribute to an analysis of issues” (p. 63). In addition to this Simons (2009), gives an example of that school’s practices have to be in line with the authority policies. He states that “an analysis of the relevant policy documents in the larger unit may be necessary to help you understand the reasons and context for the policies as well as how it is being implemented in practice” (Simons 2009, p. 63). In such, document analysis can contribute to understand the context, in the case of this research, the context in

which the higher educational programs exist- and the context that alumni's of the programs are likely to work.

The criteria that were used in deciding what documents that should be a part of the analysis was that the documents should be a part of the overarching framework for education. In such, the documents that have been analyzed in this research are:

- The Quality Framework (Udir, 2006),
- The Core Curriculum (KUF 1997),
- §1-3 and 2-1 of the Educational Act (Opplæringsloven,1998)
- And the Guidelines to the Educational Act § 1-3 and 2-1 (Proposition no.46 to the Storting, 1997/1998).

3.2.2 Interviews

Yin (2009) points out that “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p.106).) Furthermore, qualitative interviews are, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) points out, used to understand how the research participants understand the world. In this research, interviews are in such used to understand the participants' views of highly able children within the Norwegian educational system. Simons (2009) provides four points that elucidate the value of using interviews in case study research, all of which have been seen as useful for this research. As Simons sees it, the perspectives of the interviewees will become more evident through interviews than by the use of other instruments of data collection (1), and the possibility of flexibility in complex issues will be useful (2). Interviews may be a learning process for both interviewer and participants (3), and potentially uncover feelings and attitudes that cannot be observed (4) (Ibid).

In this particular research, the issues that have been studied is seen to be of a complex character, and in such it may be difficult to grasp the opinions and interpretations of the participant through the use of other methods. In relation to the fourth issue provided by Simons (2009), experiences made by the researcher (see section 1.1) suggests that there is a possibility of that the topic of high ability may be controversial in the Norwegian context. In such it seems likely that to reveal feelings and attitudes on the topic may be difficult through

other methods such as observation. The fact that interviews may be a learning process for both interviewer and participant was seen as particularly interesting for this research, since the aim of the research has been to draw attention to an issue that seems to have received little attention in the Norwegian context. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also emphasize such learning processes as outcomes of interviews. One may argue that there is a likelihood of that a possible learning process facilitated through the interview situation may influence on the feelings and understandings of the participants. This will be further elaborated on in section 3.5 that treats the reliability issues of the research.

The interview approach chosen for this research is an interview-guide approach. As Newby (2010) points out, an interview guide may be more or less structured. When there is little structure in the guide, the interview is often referred to as in-depth, and more structured interview guides that provide detailed descriptions of questions and what order they are to be asked show more similarities to that of a questionnaire. The interviews conducted in this research have been more structured than in-depth interviews but less structured than by use of a questionnaire, and may be referred to as semi- structured. In a semi- structured interview, there are topics that are to be covered, and examples of questions that may be used to approach the different topics. To include some details to the guide was seen as useful for the structure and clarity of the interviews, but at the same time, the interview topic showed to be complicated, and some openness in forms of probing was seen as useful. This is also seen as useful by Yin (2009) that points out that a fluid stream of questions may be beneficial, as long as the line of inquiry is consistent. In addition, when using an interview guide the topics included in the guide give freedom for the researcher in terms of exploring other issues that may be evident through the interview situations (Ibid). Being a novice within the field of research an interview guide approach seemed to be most suitable for me as a researcher as well as for the participants' sake, since it was thought to make the process tidier and in such help ensure that all of the topics were covered in all of the interviews (Patton 2002). Moreover, the interview guide was seen as important way to get information regarding the topics that were seen as important to answer the research questions. In such, the way the interviews were conducted contributed to how the interviews were analyzed, in the way that the themes/topics in the interview guide also influenced on the topics used to analyze the findings.

3.3 Procedures

After having established that an interview guide approach was to be used in this research, the issue of what should be included into the guide arose. Based on document analysis, multiple topics became interesting to include. In the beginning phases of the research, topics that were considered as being important to include were mostly connected to how the participants interpreted the different issues. At this stage, the topics included in the interview guide were linked closely to the research questions. The topics covered through the interview guide were:

- The Needs of highly able
- Adjusted Education/ Special Needs
- Main goals of the Educational Program
- Content /decisions on content
- Roles and responsibilities towards highly able children

The topics are based on the findings from the document analysis and literature review that was conducted in early stages of the research. Furthermore, they are seen to include both the indirect and direct mentioning of highly able children that were found through the document analysis. The indirect and direct findings are presented in table 4.1.

After having completed the interview guide, contact was made with the Norwegian Social Science Data services (NSD), which are responsible for the statutory data privacy requirements within the research. Information letter containing information about the research (see Appendix A & B) was sent for approval to the NSD along with the interview guide. While awaiting approval from the NSD I searched for possible interview participants. Several criteria made the basis for the sampling procedure of this research. These will be presented in the following.

3.3.1 Sampling

The sampling procedure of this research has been that of a purposeful character. Bryman (2008) views purposeful sampling as an attempt to establish corresponding relationships between the research questions and the research participants. In such criteria may be used in

order to ensure such relationships (Ibid). For this research, the criteria used to ensure that the participants were suitable for approaching the research questions were:

- Employed at a University or a University College
- Working within the Teacher Education Program or the Program in Special Pedagogy
- Having knowledge of the topics that are covered within the educational program, they work within.
- Having knowledge about special pedagogy or pedagogy

After having established these criteria, the search for appropriate participants was conducted on the web pages of Universities and University Colleges. After having prepared what people that would be contacted as soon as responses were given from the NSD, a pilot interview was conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview procedures (Newby 2010). The pilot study was conducted on a fellow student, and gave information as to how the questions could be altered slightly in order to be more effective and provide information closely related to the research questions. Through this, it became clear that some of the questions were unclear, and that work had to be put into clarifying what was actually being asked. Furthermore, the pilot interview showed that it would be useful with a description of the purpose of the research in the beginning of the research, rather than in the end of the interview- as first planned. The pilot study revealed that many questions could arise from the lack of information in the beginning phases. These changes contributed to completion of the Interview Guide, which was later approved by the NSD (APPENDIX E&F).

As soon as the NSD approved the research, e- mails containing the information letter of the research was sent to several participants. Initially there seemed to be difficulties in getting people to participate in the study, and some rejected taking part in the research. Initially the idea was to have more participants from each of the educational programs, but due to rejections, the sample size became smaller than initially planned. Nevertheless, the three participants that contributed to this research are seen as giving interesting information on the research question (see section 3.4.2).

3.3.2 Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in the period June- August 2010. In common in the carrying out of all of the interviews was that they were conducted at the work place of the participants, that a sound recording device was used, and that informed consents were signed by the participants and that the interviews lasted approximately an hour.

Through the first interview, it was somewhat difficult to get the interview participant to answer the questions that were asked. As an interviewer I experienced the importance of probing, which Newby (2010) points out is the call for clarification. There seemed to be a controversy connected to raising the issue of high ability with this particular participant. In this, the issues of probing and exploring issues further seemed necessary but also seemed to make the participant somewhat uncomfortable. This will be treated further in section 3.6, dealing with the ethical considerations of the research. The experience of having the participant ignore and avoid some of the questions asked contributed to better preparations to the other interviews in terms of how to probe and explore issues further in such situations. In such, these experiences influenced my skills as a researcher.

Thus, through the second and third interview the follow up questions were better prepared and increased confidence in my role as an interviewer led me to use more pauses in the interviews, which in many cases contributed to more in- depth information on the question asked.

3.3.3 Participants

The participants of this research were as seen in section 3.3.1 sampled based on some criterions. In the process of sampling, it became evident that there are differences between the Special pedagogy program and the Teacher Education program in terms whether the students at each program have to follow the same subjects. On the special pedagogy program, all students are obligated to follow the same courses, whereas on the teacher program students may choose different specialization courses. When it came to my attention that the teacher education program offers a specialization course in Adjusted Education and special pedagogical considerations, it seemed that this could be an opportunity to find out if the needs of highly able children were focused on in this course. As seen in section 3.3.1, knowledge within the field of special pedagogy/ pedagogy served as one of the criterions in choosing the

participants. In such, it was supposed that the third participant in this research could have knowledge of both the field of special pedagogy and general pedagogy- and was of that reason incorporated as a participant in this research.

Interview participant 1/ Case 1

The first participant works at a University and is connected to a bachelor program in Special Pedagogy. The participant works within the administration of the Program. The choice of including this participant in the research was done since many of the workers connected to the educational program were found to have specific areas of interest in which they do research and teach. In such, they were considered to have extensive knowledge about one specific field rather than the program as a whole. By including this participant there seemed to be a greater likelihood of getting information on all fields of the program. The participant is male and has a background within teaching (as a teacher) and special pedagogy.

The participant is not connected in the direct teaching of students through lectures, but has administrative responsibility in terms of how the program is organized. The participant will in the following be referred to as Participant 1, and quotes by the participant will be marked Interview June 17th 2010.

Interview participant 2/ Case 2

The second interview participant works at a University College, within the general teacher education program. Within the teacher education program, employees seem to work within different fields and subjects. For this research, since one of the criteria in the sampling procedure was connected to participants' knowledge of pedagogy/ special pedagogy, it seemed natural to conduct interviews within the pedagogy section of the teacher education rather than i.e. the Norwegian section. The participant is female, and has a PhD within the field of pedagogy and works as an associate professor within the teacher education program. The participant is directly in contact with the students at the higher educational program, through lectures.

In such the participant is connected with direct teaching in some of the lectures provided to students at the general teacher education. The participant will in the following be referred to as Participant 2, and quotes by this participant will be marked Interview July 9th 2010.

Interview participant 3/ Case 3

The third participant is also working within the teacher education at the same University College as Participant 2. The participant is male, and has a PhD within the field of Special Pedagogy. This participant is working within the pedagogy section of the teacher education program. In difference from Participant 2, this participant works within a specialization that is offered within the general teacher education. In such, this participant was seen as interesting for this research, since he works within a specialization course is called ‘Adjusted Education and special needs considerations’. When seen in relation to the criterions used in sample procedures, this participant seemed to have knowledge within both the field of special pedagogy and general pedagogy. In such, it also seemed that students choosing this specialization course receive information about special needs within the classroom context. The participant is connected with directly with students on the specialization course, through lectures.

This participant will in the following be referred to as Participant 3, and quotes by this participant will be marked Interview August 18th 2010.

3.4 Data Analysis

As presented in section 3.1, the use of case study design may contribute to how the collected is analyzed. This has also been the case for this research. In common for the analysis of documents and interviews has been that it has been closely connected to the aims and questions of the research of all times. In this chapter, how the analysis was conducted of documents and interviews will be presented.

3.4.1 Analysis of documents

Two issues became important in the analysis of the documents presented earlier. First, the direct mentioning of high ability (conducted in Norwegian) was important. It was assumed that the written documents on education could reveal something about the needs of highly able children, and to what extent this is something that is focused on in the overall education. This was done by searching for specific mentioning of people with exceptionalities. Since there as seen in section 2.1.2, there is no commonly used terminology for highly able children

in the Norwegian context; several Norwegian terms/words were a part of the search. These were: ‘barn med særlige evner’, ‘barn med høye evner’, ‘begavede barn’, ‘sterke elever/barn’.

Second, it was assumed that the needs of highly able children could be indirectly covered through the educational documents. Thus, indirect coverage of high ability was searched for i.e. mentioning of *all* children, which then also could be seen to include also the highly able children. Such findings through document analysis are seen to point out the educational needs and rights of all children hence also the highly able children.

Both the direct and indirect coverage of highly able children were seen to contribute to an understanding of the educational context in which the higher educational programs investigated exist. How the documents treat the issue of high ability may serve both as a background for the interviews, and provide insight into how the needs of highly able children are covered in the overall educational system.

3.4.2 Analysis of Interviews

The collected interview data were analyzed as what Simons (2009) refers to as “from several transcripts- to themes” (p. 135). Each of the three interviews was transcribed from beginning to end. This resulted in approximately fifty pages. Furthermore, the transcripts were searched for significant themes. By searching through the transcribed pages, it was searched for themes that could serve as framework in reorganizing the data. This process is known as coding (Newby, 2010). Several codes were used in the beginning phases of the analysis, and before the sorting of the codes started it was established whether they still were suitable in terms of reflecting the true perspectives of the participants. Patton (2002) points out that this is necessary in order to make sure that the categories and the discovered patterns are grounded in the specific contexts. In this, it became evident that some of the codes were less relevant for the research than others. After organizing the transcribed data within these codes, it became evident that there seemed to be strong links between some of the used codes. The connections that were found between the codes had two implications on the further analysis of the interviews:

1) Five categories derived from the codes initially used. These categories were:

- Special Needs,
- Adjusted Education,
- The needs of highly able,
- Content of the programs
- Responsibilities towards highly able children

In such, the transcribed data were sorted according to categories somewhat similar to the topics covered through the interview guide (see section 3.3). Through this, it becomes evident that the use of codes has had a combination of an inductive and deductive approach. This is to say that it has been based partially on codes that have derived from the theoretical perspectives and that also were used in making the interview guide (deductive) and partially, codes were seen to emerge from the data (inductive approach) (Newby 2010). The five categories presented above will also be used in the discussion of this research (See Chapter 5).

- 2) In analyzing the data, it became evident that the five categories were somewhat difficult to separate due to that there seemed to be mutual influences between them. In such, although the categories have been separated in the analysis and discussion, it is likely that it is difficult to draw clear lines between the categories in the ‘real world’.

The mutual influences between the used categories became important in approaching the main research question (see section 3.1). In such, how each category could be influenced by/influence on other categories is important, and will be treated to some extent through chapter 5, and in particularly in section 5.5.

3.5 Verification

There seem to be differences in what criteria that are used to judge the quality of research. As Yin (2009) sees it, the four tests that are most commonly used to judge the quality of social research are also applicable for judging the quality of case studies. For this research, however, since the study is seen as exploratory rather than explanatory (internal validity) and that, the

aim is not to lead to generalizations (external validity); only two of these are seen as useful for this research. These tests are:

- Construct Validity; which has to do with whether the operational measures used are suitable for measuring the concepts studied (Yin 2009).
- Reliability; the issue dealing with consistency and credibility of a research. In other words, reliability has to do with whether the results of the same cases can be reproduced by other researchers at another time (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Construct validity may be seen as the issue of whether the research provides information on what the research aims to find out. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that validity and issues regarding validity should be a part of all the phases of an interview study.

The issues of reliability can be evident through all stages of interview studies- from the questions asked, to the transcription of the interviews and finally in the interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A way to safeguard reliability of research is to give information about the procedures used in all stages of the research. As seen in section 3.2.2 the issues of reliability may be influenced by a possible learning situation facilitated through the interviews. This is to say that, “the process of being asked a question can cause us to think about an issue in a different way” (Newby 2010, p. 345). For reproduction of the study, it seems that the answers from the participants may have changed from those in the initial research, since their views may be influenced by the choices and measures made after being interviewed to acquire more knowledge on the topic of highly able children and their needs in the Norwegian context.

Another issue in this regard, is the reliability of transcription of interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is to say, the researcher may have transcribed the interviews in a different manner than others would have, in terms of what is being emphasized in the interviews. There exist computer programs that test quantitative reliability of transcribed material; however, this has not been used in this research (Ibid). Since the interviews were transcribed immediately after conducted, it is assumed they are reliable since the emphasis the interviewees have put on her/his responses have been remembered by the researcher. The fact that the interview- responses have been translated into English for use in the written product

has been something I as a researcher has been aware of and no problems were faced in this process.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research has a qualitative approach that may reveal participants' feelings and opinions toward highly able children and their needs. Both in the interviews and in the data analysis phase it may be important to acknowledge the challenges with dealing with emotions, values and opinions in this matter.

One important ethical consideration to be made in qualitative interviews is the issue of the anonymity of the participants. As treated in section 3.3.2, the informants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C & D). One important issue of the informed consent had to do with granted anonymity, which also was pointed out as important by the NSD. In such, no names or specific locations of the Universities/University Colleges in which they work have been mentioned in the written text. Measures to ensure anonymity also led to that the web sites accessed to gain information on the structure and content at the higher educational programs was left out of the written product.

Second, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) points out the importance of that the interviewer creates a safe environment in which the interview can be conducted. This calls for a balance between getting the information that is necessary for the research, and at the same time respecting the integrity of the interviewee (Ibid). The experiences of the data collection done through the qualitative interviews were in some instances challenged by this balance. As an interviewer, it became evident at an early stage that the topic of high ability may be a controversial topic in the Norwegian context. In the beginning phases of the first interview this was seen through that, the interviewer avoided answering questions and started to ask questions to me as a researcher instead. Subsequently, in retrospect it seems that the probing conducted within this interview may have been perceived as threatening for the interview participant and that the environment created was not as safe as it could have been. In such, the interview may have benefitted from letting the interview participant get to know before the controversial questions were asked. It should be mentioned that the researcher felt that the participant perceived the topic in itself as controversial. In such, it was experienced that the questions did all seem to be understood as controversial by the participant. The probing seemed necessary at the time in

order to obtain the information necessary to follow the inquiry of the research. Nevertheless, more preparation could have contributed to that the participant perceived the research situation as safer.

To create a safe environment for the participants as well as to analyze the data, it became important to see the information (in both the data collection and data analysis) in the context of the participants.

3.7 Delimitations to study

Bryman (2008) points out that, delimitations to a study become evident at an early stage of the research. When the research questions are established, delimitations are made accordingly to the literature, theories and methods that are most suitable to answer the research questions. In such, the delimitations are the boundaries of the study- what the research is and is not (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

For this research, the research question establishes that the only thing that will be researched is the Norwegian context. Furthermore, the issue of that only higher education institutions will be investigated places boundaries on the study. The research questions (see section 1.4) have contributed to the choice of methods used in this research. Nevertheless, the nature of the research topic may call out for further and improved research- in terms of a study where more cases are investigated and more instruments of data collection and data analysis are used, also known as triangulation (Patton 2002).

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown the methodological considerations of this research. The design of the research has shown to be that of a case- study, approached in a qualitative matter. The methods of data collection used in the research have been interviews, conducted by use of semi- structured interview guide, and document analysis. The sampling process have been purposeful, and led to interviews with three participants (see section 3.3.3). The collected data were analyzed by searching the fully transcribed interviews to find themes. The themes served as codes in the structure of the findings, and contributed to the making of five categories. The categories have served to structure the findings and results of the research (chapter 4 and 5).

The issues of verification used in this research have been construct validity and reliability (see section 3.5). Finally, ethical consideration and delimitations to the research were presented (notably in section 3.6 and 3.7)

4 Main Results

This chapter provides a simplified and structural overview of the main findings of this research. The findings will be discussed further in chapter 5 along with presentations of relevant quotations from the transcribed interviews. In the following, the main findings from the document analysis (4.1) and the interviews (4.2) will be separated, to make a tidier presentation of the findings.

4.1 Document Analysis

As seen in section 3.2.1 the documents that are analyzed in this research are:

- the Core Curriculum (KUF,1997)
- the Quality Framework (Udir, 2006)
- §1-3 and §2-1 of the Educational Act (Opplæringsloven,1998)
- The Guidelines to the Educational Act's § 1-3 and 2-1 (Proposition no. 46 to the Storting, 1997/1998).

In the following, a presentation of the main findings from the document analysis is given. As seen through section 3.4.1, there have been two different focuses through the document analysis: Detection of direct mentioning of highly able children in the documents, and findings that indirectly concern the education of highly able children. Thus, table 4.1 separates the direct mentioning found in the documents and the indirect coverage i.e. coverage of all children that may be seen to also entail highly able children.

Table 4.1: Findings through Document Analysis

DOCUMENT	DIRECT COVERAGE	NO DIRECT COVERAGE	INDIRECT COVERAGE
The Core Curriculum		X	Adjusted Education for 'all'.
The Quality Framework	X		Adjusted Education for 'all'.
The Educational Act § 1-3		X	Adjusted Education for 'all'.
The Educational Act § 2-1		X	Special Needs Education as organization of Adjusted Education. Used if not satisfactory outcome of ordinary education.
The Guidelines to Educational Act: § 1-3		X	Adjusted Education for 'all'.
The Guidelines to Educational Act: § 2-1	X		Adjusted Education for 'all'. If room for it- also for the highly able.

4.1.1 Direct coverage of high ability

As seen in table 4.1, the first column in the table gives information on the direct mentioning of highly able that was found through the document analysis. It shows that two (the Quality Framework in the Curriculum and the Guideline to the Educational Act § 2-1) of the six documents that were analyzed were found to directly mention highly able children. The coverage of high ability in these documents are however of a different character. The quality framework points out that Adjusted Education should be for all children, including the highly able children, whereas the Guideline to the Educational Act § 2-1 points out; highly able children should receive Adjusted Education- If there is room for it in the ordinary education situation.

4.1.2 Indirect coverage of Highly Able

As pointed out in table 4.1, all of the documents have an indirect coverage of high ability, in that they cover Adjusted Education for all; hence an assumption is made as to that highly able children are a part of 'all' children. Paragraph 2-1 has to do with special needs education. As

seen through figure 2.3, special needs education is a way to organize Adjusted Education. In such, § 2-1 of the Educational Act may also cover Adjusted Education. The issue of whether special needs education is seen as a way to organize Adjusted Education for highly able children will be treated in section 5.

4.2 Interviews

As seen in section 3.4.2 the interview analysis was done through organizing the results into the following categories:

- Special needs,
- Adjusted Education,
- The needs of highly able children,
- Content
- Responsibilities towards highly able children

Although the categories all may be seen to influence on each other, they are separated in order to get a more structured overview of the findings. In the following, four tables will be presented. The tables contain the different categories used in the analysis: The needs of highly able children and whether high ability is understood as a special need (table 4.2), Adjusted Education (table 4.3), Content (table 4.4) and Responsibility (table 4.5). Each of the tables will present quotes expressed by the participants within the category, and in relation to the questions asked by the researcher. In each of the tables, it is referred to what section in the discussion that will cover the issue.

The needs of highly able children

Table 4.2 Main findings on HA needs

	THE NEEDS OF HIGHLY ABLE CHILDREN	
	Is high ability understood as a 'Special need'?	What are the needs of highly able children?
Case 1	No	'They have needs, but these will mostly be covered through ordinary education in terms of extra books etc.'
Case 2	No	'HA children, like all others have needs of Adjusted Education to keep their motivation and ensure their development through education.'
Case 3	No	'The needs of HA children is to receive help if negative consequences of their education becomes evident.'
Covered in Section	5.1	5.2.2

Adjusted Education

Table 4.3 Main findings on Adjusted Education

	ADJUSTED EDUCATION	
	Approach	The needs of HA children within the frame of Adjusted Education
Case 1	Wide approach (in relation to Nordahl's (2009) table, see table 2.3)	'HA children do not qualify for Special needs education, and through Adjusted Education-teachers have to focus on the children that cannot read, rather than the ones that know more than required.'
Case 2	Wide approach (in relation to Nordahl's (2009) table, see table 2.3)	'Adjusted Education seems to mostly be connected with weaker students today.'
Case 3	Wide approach (in relation to Nordahl's (2009) table, see table 2.3)	'The sky is the limit, so to say. According to the present curriculum, Adjusted Education is extended to not only include the participation in education, but also focused on the results/outcome of education.'
Covered in section:	5.2.1	5.2.1/5.2.2

Content

Table 4.4 Main Findings on Program Content

	COVERAGE OF HA IN THE PROGRAMS' CONTENT	
	Known coverage in Educational Program?	Sufficient Coverage?
Case 1	No	'Yes, since HA is not a part of the Special pedagogy field in Norway it should not be covered through program.'
Case 2	No	'No, should be more since teachers do not have the knowledge of these children, their needs is not being met in the best way.'
Case 3	Yes, has been covered some in past years.	'Yes. HA is not the first issue you focus on. Many other issues become before this. Teachers today are capable to help both weaker and highly able children.'
Covered in section	5.3	5.3.3

Responsibility

Table 4.5 Main findings on Responsibility towards HA children

	RESPONSIBILITY FOR MEETING THE NEEDS OF HIGHLY ABLE CHILDREN		
	Role of Alumni's	Responsibility of alumni's from their program	Who are responsible?
Case 1	'Alumni's from the special pedagogy program do not have the competencies to teach in school. Supposedly they'll work with special needs education.'	'Since HA is not a part of special pedagogy, the responsibility of the alumni's is not to meet the needs of HA children.'	'If any are responsible it is the principals at schools. They decide what teachers should focus on.'
Case 2	'Alumni's from this program will most likely work as teachers in school.'	'Teachers should work towards meeting the needs of these children- through providing Adjusted Education.'	'Principals at schools and school- owners are responsible for focusing on the issue, teachers are responsible through their everyday work.'
Case 3	'Alumni's from this program will most likely work in school-teaching.'	'The responsibility must be seen in relation to the tasks of the profession. The task today is that all children should have equal outcome of education, <i>not</i> that you should have optimal possibilities. In such responsibility lies in offering Adjusted Education' and act when negative consequences become evident.'	'The question becomes to what degree it should be spent resources on a small percentage. Seen like this, the individual has to take responsibility of their own education.'
Covered in section	5.4.1	5.4	5.4

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the main findings of this research have been outlined and presented in tables according to where it was found (documents/interviews), where the findings were made (in what document/in interview with what participant). It has become evident that the participants reveal differences and similarities in their views within the different categories used in the analysis of this research. Although some of the findings, as seen in the tables presented above,

may be interesting discoveries seen separately, they are seen to be added value in the following discussion. This is seen as especially important since the categories used in the analysis of the interviews in the real world may be seen as difficult to separate due to the mutual influence that is found between them (see section 3.4.2). Thus, the aim of the following discussion is not merely to give in depth understandings of the participants' answers within the categories, but also to create an understanding of the links between them. The links between the categories may be seen as mutual influences, and will be covered through chapter 5 and in particular through section 5.5.

5 Discussion

This chapter will treat the three sub- questions of this research (see section 1.4). Section 5.1 will investigate the first sub- question, on whether highly able children are seen as having special needs or not. This will be connected to the interview responses in relation to the category ‘special needs’ (see table 4.2), and the findings made through document analysis (see table 4.1).

The second sub- question of this research relates to similarities and differences found between the higher education institutions. Due to the extensive character of the question, the discussion related to it will be divided in two: Section 5.2, treating the issues of Adjusted Education and the needs of highly able children, and section 5.3 that treat the issue of content on the programs. In such, the findings from the interview responses within the categories ‘Adjusted Education’, ‘the needs of highly able children’ and ‘content’ are used and discussed (see tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).

Section 5.4 treats the third sub- question, and hence looks into who are seen as responsibility towards the highly able children. The responses expressed by the participants within the ‘responsibility’ category are used (table 4.5).

Finally, as seen in section 3.4.2, the categories that are used in the analysis of the data are mutually influential. Section 5.5 will show examples of how such influences may be evident. Moreover, the effects of mutual influence will be seen in relation to the issue of research.

5.1 Are the needs of highly able children seen as ‘special needs’?

This section treats the first sub- question of this research (see section 1.4). In order to establish whether highly able children are seen as having special needs or not, it is necessary to make an understanding of what special needs are seen to be in the Norwegian context. Subsequently, the issue of what a special need is seen to be will be treated (section 5.1.1) prior to the issue of whether the needs of highly able children is considered to be ‘special needs’ or not (section 5.1.2).

5.1.1 What is a 'special need'?

'Special needs' and 'individual needs' are terms that seem to connect to organization of education (see section 2.2.1). In relation to this, the question may become if the children that receive special needs education are the only children that are considered as having special needs. Furthermore, it becomes interesting to see what separates 'special needs' from 'individual needs'.

Through the NOU (2009) report it is pointed out that special needs is a term that is used both for the needs of children that receive special needs education and children that have difficulties in following the ordinary education. Consequently, there are big differences in how many children that are seen to have special needs. 25 % are seen as having difficulties in following the ordinary education, whereas 6-7 % of children in Norwegian schools today are receiving special needs education (NOU 2009). Through this it becomes clear that the term 'special needs' is not only used for the needs of children that receive special needs education, since many children in fact may be seen as having special needs without receiving special needs education. The question then becomes: Why do some children receive special needs education, while others are expected to receive Adjusted Education through the ordinary education?

It seems obvious that the interview participants' answers to whether they view the needs of highly able children as a special need or not will be influenced by how they view the term 'special needs'. There seemed to be a consensus among all the participants that use of the term 'special need' is connected to the needs of children that receive special needs education. Whereas Participant 1 and Participant 3 understood special needs as the needs of children within special needs education, Participant 2 expanded her understanding slightly:

“Don't we all have some form of special need? Where is the limit? Now it is § 5-1, if you cannot be a part of the ordinary education, and you have a diagnosis. But how do we diagnose highly able children?” (July 8th 2010).

Through this, it seems that the participant is of the opinion that special needs may be evident in all people, and that different people may have different strengths and needs. In such, it seems that the participant opens for an interpretation similar to the one provided in NOU (2009): Children can have special needs without receiving special needs education. Nevertheless, it is pointed out that there are certain criterions that have to be met for qualification for special needs education, notably diagnosis and unsatisfactory outcome of the

education. In such, it seems like the participant connects the term ‘special needs’ to the needs of children that either receive or should receive special needs education, and that these are the children that do not get a satisfactory outcome of the ordinary education and that have a diagnosis.

The link between special needs and diagnosis may also be seen through Chapter 5 in the Norwegian Educational Act that deals with issues regarding Special Needs Education (Opplæringsloven, 1998). Paragraph 5-3 of the Educational Act states that an expert assessment will be conducted to evaluate if the child will benefit from special needs education, after taking into consideration the implications the child’s special needs have for his/her education (Opplæringsloven, 1998). If there is found that the ordinary education may be organized differently, in order to better meet these children’s needs this is seen as a better solution for the children and thus, the child does not qualify for special needs education. It seems that the practice of special needs education in Norway is that entrance to special needs education may be seen as somatic or medical (Kirkebæk and Simonsen, 2004). This is to say that the allocation of resources towards special needs education is connected with given diagnoses. Nevertheless, written documents on education point out that whether a child has a diagnosis or not should be less important than the actual need of children. In such, the actual need a child has is what the expert should assess, not whether there is given a diagnosis (Udir, 2009).

5.1.2 Do ‘highly able’ children have special needs?

The question raised by Participant 2, on how one can diagnose high ability may be seen in relation to the issues of intelligence testing, presented in section 2.1.4. Little focus on high ability in the Norwegian context as well as no use of intelligence testing in the Norwegian context, as has been prevalent in the history of some countries- indicates that there exists no diagnosing of highly able children. However, this alone does not point out that highly able children do not have special needs, since the actual needs children have should be primary to potential diagnoses. As seen through section 2.1.4, highly able children may be seen as having needs that differ from the average children’s needs. The fact that some highly able children underachieve due to unchallenging and unadjusted expectations is a consequence of that these needs are not being met through education. This points out that the needs of the children with high ability may in fact not be met through the ordinary education and thus, that one by only

looking at the needs perspective of the highly able may conclude with that they are entitled to special needs education. Nevertheless, the representative from the Special Pedagogy Program informed about an issue that elucidate further on whether highly able children are considered as having special needs or not.

“Our problem is that the law on special needs education actually specify, if I remember correctly, that this does not apply for highly able children. It (special needs education) is not meant to be for highly able children.”(Interview, June 17th 2010).

Although, as seen through Table 4.1, there are not found any mentioning of the highly able in the Educational Act, published guidelines to the paragraphs entail information about this issue. Although this was not specifically what the informant said, it is assumed that this is what was referred to. In Proposition no. 46 to the Storting (1997/1998), guidelines are given to each paragraph of the Educational Act. In reference to chapter 5 in the Educational Act that regard special needs education, the guidelines inform that:

“Pupils that have prerequisites to learn faster and more than the average have no rights from chapter five in the law. However, children with high ability are included in the general goal of Adjusted Education, - § 1-2. When the ordinary educational situation have room for it, the special prerequisites and needs of these children also have to be met”. (Proposition no 46 to the Storing, (1997/1998), Guideline to § 5-1).

This is made even clearer through a report on special needs education, when it is stated that special needs education only is for children that do not get a satisfactory outcome of education (Udir, 2009). Furthermore, when highly able children in general are seen as having outcome of education through the report, they do accordingly not have rights to special needs education. Through this, one may argue that the actual needs of highly able children in fact are seen as secondary to their ‘label’ or diagnosis. Although, there are no diagnosis connected to being highly able in the Norwegian context it seems that the establishing of that a child has the perquisites to learn faster and more than the average serves as a label. With the label as ‘highly able’, it follows that they have no rights to special needs education. In such, when it comes to highly able children the label seems to weigh more than the actual needs of the children. Through this, it becomes evident that the needs of highly able children through the written documents on education are not considered to be special needs. As seen through table 4.2, this is also supported by all three interview participants.

It seems clear that the Norwegian term ‘special needs’ when used in relation to special needs education, does not entail the needs of highly able children. Through this section, it is pointed out that children that do not receive special needs education also may have special needs, and that in such, children in ordinary education may have special needs. Nevertheless, since there seemed to be a consensus among all three interview participants on the use of the term ‘special needs’ only in relation to special needs education, in the following term ‘individual needs’ will be used for the needs of all children in the ordinary education- including the highly able. As seen in section 2.3.2, special pedagogy is often seen to be the discipline of education of people with special needs. In such, it may then be difficult to justify that special needs education in fact include the highly able children- since it is seen that they do not have special needs. In such, whether or not a highly able child’s individual needs are met through the ordinary education depend on how the education is organized. It seems likely that how the education is organized will affect all children’s learning experiences. Consequently, a better organization of the ordinary education may contribute to that all children including the 25 % that through the NOU (2009) report are considered to have difficulties in following the ordinary education, will have better chances of following the ordinary education. Moreover, as Skogen (2005) points out, in depth understanding of the needs of different marginalized groups is necessary to optimize the organization of education. In such, it becomes interesting to see if the participant has such in-depth understandings of the needs of highly able children, and how this can be fitted in the frame of Adjusted Education.

5.2 Adjusted education and the needs of highly able children

Through previous section (5.1), it was made clear that the needs of highly able children are viewed as individual needs, rather than special needs. In such, it was shown that children with high ability are not entitled to special needs education. Hence, it seems that the highly able children should receive Adjusted Education through the ordinary education. The second sub question of this research has to do with similarities and differences between the two programs that are investigated (see section 1.4). To enable answering of this question, this chapter will begin with an introduction to the participants’ approaches to Adjusted Education, and what they consider the needs of highly able children to be. Since it is already established that the needs of highly able children will not be met through special needs education it seems that

their needs will have to be met through organization of Adjusted Education through the ordinary education. Thus, how the participants' view the needs of highly able children within Adjusted Education will be treated (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2); since it is within that framework, their needs will have to be met. Whether or not the content on the higher educational programs reflect the perceived needs of the highly able children is also considered to be important in answering the second research question, and will be covered through section 5.3.

5.2.1 Approaches to Adjusted Education

It is acknowledged that the alumni's from the two different educational programs may have different roles in meeting the needs of children through education. The participants' from the teacher education viewed the role of the alumni's to be as working towards Adjusted Education through teaching in schools, whereas Participant 1 pointed out that alumni's from the special pedagogy program are thought to work more with special needs education (see table 4.5). More on the different roles and responsibilities of the alumni's will be presented in section 5.4. Nevertheless, the approaches towards Adjusted Education is seen as interesting for this research, since special needs education is seen to be a way to organize Adjusted Education (see section 2.2.1). In such, as Bachmann and Haug (2006) points out, research on special needs education and within the field of special pedagogy in general will influence on how Adjusted Education is understood, and vice versa (see section 2.2.2). Hence, since Adjusted Education will be important in the work of all the participants, it becomes important to get an understanding of the views the different participants have on Adjusted Education.

Table 2.4, provides an overview of two different approaches to Adjusted Education, notably a narrow or wide approach (Nordahl 2009). It seems likely that the approach one has to Adjusted Education will influence on ones views on education, and subsequently on how the needs of children are met through the ordinary education. Through a narrow approach to Adjusted Education, there will be a more individualized focus, with a focus on the needs of the individual prior to the needs of the community (Ibid). Interpreted like this, one may argue that there is a greater likelihood of that the individual needs of all children will be met. This is to say, a child is more likely to get education adjusted to their needs, when their needs comes prior to the focus on the community- which may lead to limitations in the organization of education.

Nevertheless, a narrow approach may be criticized for leaving out a focus on the community, and in such not contribute to inclusion (Nordahl 2009) In addition, such a degree of individualization may cause concern since it is likely that teachers do not have the resources to individualize the education to such an extent. This is to say that teachers most likely will not have the time and capacity to organize all education adjusted to each pupil's level.

On the other hand, a wide approach to Adjusted Education will according to Nordahl (2009) through its focus on the community embrace the educational idea of inclusion, and may of that reason be considered as beneficial for work in schools. As seen through table 2.4, a wide approach focuses on both collective approaches and individual adjustment of education. However, one may argue that there is a risk of that a wide approach cover up what individual needs is considered to be, since these needs may be difficult to detect through a focus on the community.

There seemed to be a consensus among all of three research participants to that Adjusted Education should be approached through a wide approach. This is to say that they interpret Adjusted Education as education that is sensitive to the individual's needs, while still focusing on the collective (see table 2.4). Participant 2 expressed this as:

“Adjusted education is not to meet every child's needs every day. That is impossible when there are 30 children in each class. However, you as a teacher have to think about how you organize the education so that every child in the course of a week should have education that is adjusted to their needs” (Interview 9th July 2010).

In this, the participant point out that Adjusted Education is something that should be provided to all children in the classroom. Participant 1 and 3 also have the understanding of that Adjusted Education regards all pupils. This may not be surprising since § 1-3 of the Educational Act warrants Adjusted Education, and specifically point out that it is to be for all children (see table 4.1). In addition to this, as seen in table 4.1, the Quality Framework states that Adjusted Education should be given to both children that have special difficulties and children that have special abilities or talents. Through this, it is pointed out that highly able children also are entitled to Adjusted Education.

Nevertheless, and quite surprisingly it seems that all of the participant's are familiar with other interpretations of Adjusted Education. Participant 2 states that Adjusted Education often is interpreted as something that is given the children that have special difficulties. This seems to narrow Adjusted Education to only regard the children with difficulties and special needs

and hence, leave the highly able children out of the interpretation. One may also question to what extent it is likely that children in the 'middle' (neither weak nor highly able) is included in Adjusted Education if it is interpreted in this way. The two other participants (1 and 3) seem to support this view, and strengthen it further by how they themselves interpret the term. Participant 3 interpret Adjusted Education to be for all children but pointed out that this in many cases would mean a focus on the weaker students. "As a teacher you do not primarily focus on the needs of highly able children. There are many other tasks to do before this" (Interview August 18th 2010). In such, it seems that although the participant views high ability as being for all children, he points to that the workload of teachers makes it necessary to prioritize in terms of Adjusted Education. In this regard, it becomes interesting to investigate what the needs of highly able children are seen to be, and in such, on what grounds the prioritizing is done. This will be treated further in section 5.2.2.

Participant 1 that represents the special pedagogy program of this research also seemed to agree with that the teachers have other more important roles to do before focusing on the highly able. He expressed this by giving an example: "If a child cannot read this is where you put in your efforts, not with the child that already knows more than he/she is expected to" (Interview June 17th 2010). It may be argued, within the limitation of this research that this indicates that there may be possibilities of that people working within education interpret Adjusted Education as something that regards only the weak.

An interesting observation in regards to the approaches to and interpretations of Adjusted Education is that there seems to be a discrepancy in the answers provided by the participants. This is to say, on the one hand, all the participants regard Adjusted Education to be for all children. On the other hand, Adjusted Education is possibly interpreted as only for the weaker pupils. Indications of such a discrepancy may also be detected through the educational documents investigated in this research.

In the Educational Act and the Quality Framework Adjusted Education is pointed out to be for all children and points directly to that this should include 'weak' and 'strong' (highly able) pupils (see table 4.1). However, it is treated somewhat differently in another document that has been investigated. In addition to making clear that highly able children do not have rights to special needs education, the Guidelines to the Educational Act states that:

“...highly able children are covered by the general goal of Adjusted Education... When the ordinary education situation has room for it, the special perquisites and needs of these children also have to be met.” (Proposition no. 46 to the Storting, 1997/1998, Guideline to §5-1).

Through this, it seems like the highly able children are covered by Adjusted Education unless there is no room for it in the ordinary education situation. This may link back to the allegation made by Participant 3; teachers have to prioritize in the education situation. Although no conclusions can be drawn on how these guidelines are interpreted by educators in general, there seems to be given an opening to not focus on the needs of highly able children in the ordinary education.

Whether these guidelines have influenced on the participants' views on Adjusted Education and high ability, or not is unknown. Nevertheless, it seems possible that the discrepancy between that Adjusted Education is seen to be for all in some documents and in the Guidelines to the Educational Act is seen to be for all if it is room for it, may influence educators. Regardless of what has influenced Participant 3, he provides a more in-depth understanding of that highly able children may not be the first focused on by teachers in Adjusted Education. By participant 3, it is pointed out that the teacher education seems to focus on the 2/3 of pupils that function within what is presented in the classroom.

“...the teacher education is little focused on the 1/3 that exists of pupils that struggle to follow the education and pupils that do not get challenges through education” (Interview August 18th 2010).

As seen through section 5.1 pupils that struggle to follow the education may in some cases qualify for special needs education, but highly able pupils that do not get challenges through education do not have the same right to special needs education. In such, the ‘weaker’ pupils may receive help from others than the teachers in their education, whereas the highly able children do not have educational rights to receive other education than the one provided in the ordinary education. One may argue that one by viewing highly able pupils as part of the 1/3 that are not focused on in the teacher education, there is a possibility of that these pupils are deprived of qualified educators that are able to acknowledge and meet their needs.

It is acknowledged by the author that Adjusted Education is complex, and that it most likely is challenging for most teachers to adjust education in classrooms of approximately 30 pupils. In such, there also seems to be a possibility of that these challenges of reaching all children may influence teachers' interpretations of Adjusted Education. Based on that it seems likely that

these challenges are prevalent in the work of most teachers, it seems that the ordinary education situation in some cases may be interpreted as not having room for including highly able children in the ordinary education. One may assume that views on the needs of highly able children also may influence to what extent they are prioritized by teachers and whether there is considered to be room for them in the ordinary education situation. In such, whether the highly able children are seen as having rights to Adjusted Education or not, may be influenced by how their needs are perceived by educators.

5.2.2 The needs of highly able children

Table 4.2 provided a simplified overview of the three participants' understandings of what the needs of highly able children are.

Participant 2 pointed out that the needs of highly able children are apparent in the classrooms, and express that:

”Some highly able children go in the opposite direction because it (the education) becomes boring. They find no, there is no challenge. Therefore, they lose their motivation. Because they do not get to use their abilities” (July 9th 2010).

What in this quote is referred to as ‘going the opposite direction’ may be seen to coincide with the theory of underachievement (see section 2.1.4). In other words, if the education the highly able children receive is not adjusted to their needs and predispositions the children may develop problem behaviors and in such, go in the opposite direction of learning. This shows that Participant 2 acknowledges that there are unfortunate consequences of not focusing on highly able children through education. One may argue that this seems to coincide with concerns from parents, as found on the internet (see section 2.4.2). Furthermore, the participant points out that the needs of highly able are like those of other children- they need education adjusted to their predispositions and needs to avoid unfortunate consequences such as underachievement.

Participant 3 pointed to that one may interpret the term ‘high ability’ in different ways, and expressed that: “high ability can be viewed either a possibility, or as a base for aberrant development” (Interview August 18th 2010). This is to say that the participant interpret high ability to be either a possibility to reach higher levels, or to be a base for development of problem behaviors or other unfortunate consequences. For this research, the definition used

defines highly able to be children that either have displayed exceptionalities or have a potential for such exceptionalities (see section 2.1.3). In such, one may assume that all highly able children, with appropriate support may come to the point where they display exceptionalities. This is also pointed out through Gagnè's Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talented, where the teachers are seen as part of the catalysts that contribute to highly able children's positive development (see section 2.1.4). Participant 3, also include the characteristics of underachievement in how he understands the needs of highly able children, but seem to view the actual needs differently than Participant 2:

“If children are unhappy in schools as a result of that they do not experience challenges- they are bored or act out, which are common characteristics of highly able children that do not get learning outcomes- you as a teacher need to do something about it” (Interview August 18th 2010).

In such, the needs of highly able children seem to be understood by Participant 3, as needs of interference after possible unfortunate consequences have developed. One may point out the interesting aspect of that both Participant 2 and Participant 3 are connected to the teacher education program, but that their views in terms of needs of highly able children differ. The two participants seem to agree on the unfortunate consequences unsuitable education may have for highly able children, but to disagree on at what point these children have need of support. In relation to the issue of that teachers have to prioritize what children to focus on within Adjusted Education (see section 5.2.1), it seems that Participant 2 is of the opinion that these children will benefit from being prioritized and in such receive Adjusted Education. Whereas one might understand Participant 3's response as indicating that highly able children is not and not necessarily should be a priority in Adjusted Education. One may raise a question of if this is an indication of that highly able children, as seen by Participant 3, are seen as managing on their own unless proven differently.

As seen through table 4.2, Participant 1 also acknowledges that the highly able children have needs. He expressed that:

“There are many articles online written by frustrated parents that worry over how their children are followed-up in schools. I checked it up before this interview. I believe this concern is real.” (Interview 17th June 2010).

Through this, Participant 1 seems to be of the opinion that highly able children in some cases are not followed- up appropriately through the Norwegian educational system. This seems to be similar to a view of that highly able children in some cases do not get their needs met

through education. In addition to this, Participant 1 pointed to that there are few resources in schools when it comes to meeting the needs of highly able children. As seen in section 5.2.1, the participant is of the opinion that the highly able children are not the primary focus through Adjusted Education. In such, it seems that Participant 1 on the one hand acknowledges that there is real concern of that the needs of highly able children are not appropriately met through education, but on the other hand dismiss the issue of meeting their needs by referring to lack of resources. In relation to this, the participant pointed out that highly able children could have needs of extra books etc. in the education. One may argue that this seems like something that may not need extra resources and in such, that something Participant 1 sees as a solution of how to meet the needs of highly able children. One may argue that to have one solution that is seen as suitable for all highly able children may seem to be little sensitive to the individual differences between children. In addition, the participant had objections to the use of the term 'high ability'. The participant suggested the use of IQ as a nominator in establishing who the highly able children are. From this, there may arise to problems:

- 1- This research has chosen to use high ability after consideration to what is most suitable in the Norwegian context, and in such intelligence, testing was seen as inappropriate and as not being the most beneficial for these children (see section 2.4.2).
- 2- The participant calls for use of intelligence tests of highly able children and at the same time underlines that there are lacks of resources in schools. It seems likely that intelligence testing would make need of more resources, since to conduct and analyze such tests may be time consuming. In such, intelligence testing may seem like an unfruitful solution since it may not be what is most beneficial for the pupils and may not be feasible in terms of that resources are lacking. In section 5.1.1, it was seen that diagnoses serve as a criterion in establishing who should receive special needs education, but it was also shown that a diagnosis in itself should have less value in this than the actual needs of children. In addition to this, the highly able children are specifically seen as not having right to special needs education (see section 5.1.2). In such, it seems that to make use of intelligence tests in order to establish who are seen as highly able or not may have little use in the educational praxis, since these children will not receive special needs education even if given a 'diagnosis'.

Through this section (5.2) it has been shown that all three of the participants seem to have a wide approach to Adjusted Education, seen in relation to Nordahl's (2009) table (see table 2.4). Furthermore, all of the participants pointed out that Adjusted Education is seen to be mostly related to the children that may be defined as 'weaker' in the classroom context. In such, it was shown that the goal of Adjusted Education might be seen as not including the highly able children. Lack of resources and the workload teachers have in classrooms with approximately 30 children was by Participant 1 and 3 pointed out as a reason for that teachers have to prioritize in terms of what children they should focus on. These two participants seem to view the needs of highly able children as something that will not be prioritized, although they are considered as having educational needs. Both of these participants are connected to special pedagogy and one may argue that they seem to share a concern of that a focus on the needs of highly able children would be at the expense of a focus on those who are defined as weak.

Through this one may ask: Is there a possibility of that perceived needs of highly able children is static to such an extent that does not seem to embrace individual differences between the group and in such, that it influences and shapes the understandings of Adjusted Education?

5.3 The content on the Educational Programs

As seen in the introduction of chapter 5, this section also relates to the second sub-question of this research. The issues that will be covered in the following are similarities and differences found in the content of the investigated educational programs. The actual content on the educational system may in fact be what is closest connected to the question asked in the main research question of this research. This is to say, to be able to understand to what extent the needs of highly able children are acknowledged and focused on through the higher educational programs, it is necessary to investigate the actual content.

In the following, the goals of the educational programs as well as roles of the alumni's will be presented briefly (5.3.1). This will be done in order to establish what coverage that may be expected within the educational programs. In section 5.3.2, what was found in terms of actual coverage of highly able children and their needs will be presented. This will also include an understanding of how the decisions on content are made on the different programs, and to get

an understanding of what the participants' roles are in the decision-making in terms of content/coverage on the educational programs. Whether the participants view the actual coverage as sufficient will be covered in section 5.3.3.

It should be mentioned that the 'content' category used in the analysis of the interviews and discussed in this section may be somewhat connected to the other categories. This may be most prevalent in section 5.3.3, that treats whether the participants view the extent to which their educational programs focus on highly able children as sufficient content or not.

5.3.1 Roles of Alumni's

As seen through section 5.1, Participant 1 points out that the program educates students to work with special needs education, through either direct work or organization of it. As seen in table 4.5, the participant express that the role of special pedagogy alumni's will not be to teach in schools, since they do not have teaching competencies. Through this, it seems that the role of the special pedagogy alumni's will not have to do with the field of highly able children. Nevertheless, as seen in section 2.2.1, the views on special needs education and on Adjusted Education influence each other. The special pedagogy program may contribute to knowledge contribution within the educational field. In such, the roles of the alumni's of this program in terms of high ability may be more as complementing the knowledge of teachers and others that may work directly with highly able children.

The roles of alumni's from the teacher education program is as seen in table 4.5, by both Participant 2 and Participant 3 viewed to be as teachers in schools. This is to say that the teacher education is more directly connected to the teaching that will be given in school than the Special pedagogy program.

5.3.2 Are the needs of Highly Able a part of the Program Content?

Investigations of the syllabus literature and lectures at the different higher educational programs as well as the interview participant's answers have been important in establishing if the educational programs cover the topic of high ability.

In common for both of the educational programs including the specialization course was that investigations of the lecture schedules and the syllabus lists found online resulted in no

findings directly connected to the topic of high ability. Answers from the participants seemed to support this. Participant 2, from the general teacher education expressed this as: “I think our syllabus books contain next to nothing on these (highly able) children“(Interview July 9th 2010). In addition, the participant adds that to her knowledge, highly able children have not been a part of the teacher program content in the previous years.

Participant 3 expressed that there at time of the interview was no coverage of highly able children at the specialization course. Although there is no coverage of this at present time, the participant is aware of that high ability has been covered in previous years.

“This year, highly able children are not on the lecture plan, but last year we had something on them” (Interview August 18th 2010).

In such, there seems to be a difference between the general teacher education program and the specialization course in terms of whether high ability has been on the content in the past years or not. However, at present time, there seems to be nothing on the highly able children in neither the general teacher education program nor the specialization course within the program.

Participant 3 pointed out that when the highly able children were covered in previous years there was not used specific literature on highly able children and their needs. The focus was mostly on what may be possible reasons of that some children are unhappy in school. Thus, it seems that Participant 3 is of the opinion that all of the literature on the entire teacher education program was as focused on the children with high ability as those with special needs. This is to say, all literature on education and Adjusted Education are by Participant 3 seen to implicit include the highly able children. One may question whether it seems likely that the literature on Adjusted Education will be interpreted to also cover the highly able children, if the understanding of Adjusted Education is that it regards the children that may be defined as ‘weaker’.

Nevertheless, the notion made by Participant 3 on that a possible emphasis on high ability will have to be presented within Norway’s present educational context and thus, within the syllabus literature available on the specialization course, seems reasonable. The educational context is the context in which the highly able children and their needs will be evident. Subsequently, what is interesting for educators to know is how these children can be met through the Norwegian educational system. As seen through section 2.1.2, high ability may be

viewed as a socio- cultural phenomenon (Persson, 2005). Considering this the coverage of highly able children in higher education programs may be most useful if seen in relation to the context in which the alumni's are to work as well as to where the highly able children are. Through section 5.1, it was pointed out that highly able children should get education adjusted through the ordinary education. Thus, one may argue that the coverage within the educational programs should be on how one best can meet these children's' needs within the ordinary classroom education. Seen like this, Participant 3 seems to make a valid point on how one can incorporate highly able children into higher educational programs.

However, when there is no specific literature on highly able children and their needs, one may wonder to what extent this is something focused on. One may question if there is a possibility of that the concern of that a focus on the highly able children will be at the expense of the 'weaker' children in class, are transmitted to the higher educational program as well. This is to say, one may question if the issue of how one prioritizes between highly able children and those who are defined as 'weak' in a classroom also may be evident in the higher educational program. It seems likely that in such a case, the views on the needs of highly able children as receiving support after unfortunate consequences have developed may have been what have been covered through the specialization course in previous years.

The answers provided by Participant 1, on whether or not high ability is a part of the program content also confirmed what was found through the online investigations:

“I have search through past and present course plans to see if there has been a coverage of these children (highly able), and could not find it. I have also talked to some colleagues that agree with that these children are not a part of the special pedagogical field, although that is the case in other countries” (Interview June 17th 2010).

Through this, it becomes clear that there seems to be no content related to highly able children and their needs in the Special Pedagogy program investigated. It seems that the participant through this also rule out that these children should be a part of the program content, by saying that highly able children are not a part of the special pedagogical field. This will be treated further in section 5.3.3, dealing with whether the coverage on high ability on the programs are viewed as sufficient.

In investigating the content on the educational programs, it also becomes interesting to see how the decisions on content are made on each of them. It seems likely that if the interview

participants have influence on what is to be the content, in terms of on the syllabus and in lectures, their views and opinions when it comes to highly able children and their needs may be transmitted to the content that is seen on the educational programs/ course.

Decisions on Content

It is assumed that the roles and mandates of the alumni's of the programs are to have in their work plays a part in what is emphasized in the content. In such, the decisions made on content seem to be partially based on the roles of alumni's. Hence, the content on the teacher education should prepare the students to fulfill the goals and responsibilities in their work life as teachers. Moreover, in the same way, special pedagogy should have a content that prepare the students for working towards the goals and responsibilities connected to being a special pedagogy alumni. In such, there is likely to be differences in what is viewed as necessary to cover in the educational programs. Through this, it seems that the decisions on content may be linked to and influenced by other categories that were used in the interview analysis. One example of this may be that if the needs of highly able children are not acknowledged or perceived as important, the roles alumni's of the teacher education program and the special pedagogy program may have in the work with highly able children may not be emphasized. Subsequently, the decisions on content may be based on this and lead to that 'high ability' is not viewed as necessary to include on the program content. This may also be connected with what professions that are seen as responsible for meeting the needs of the highly able children, and will be treated further in section 5.4.

There were found some similarities in how decisions on content are made at each of the higher educational programs. All the participants inform that within the programs, there are internal discussions/hearings or team meetings on what are to be incorporated in the programs and the specialization course. Furthermore, on the teacher education the decisions have to be based on the existing Framework for teacher education (UFD, 2003), as well as the written documents on education (such as the Educational Act and the Curriculum). In common for the two participants that are connected to the teacher education program (Participant 2 and 3) seems to be that they have influence on what is incorporated in the program/course content within which they are working. This is not to say that they make the decisions on their own, but rather that they are included in the discussions and possibly could bring topics in for discussion. In addition to this there seems to be some degrees of freedom connected to what is

incorporated in the lectures on the overall teacher educational program. In such, the lecture plan may serve as a framework for the education that is to be given, but topics such as high ability may be covered through use of the syllabus literature, although it is not specifically mentioned on the lecture plan.

The Participant 1 informs that written documents on education work as a framework in deciding the educational content at the Special Pedagogy program as well. The discussions on content are done in a program- team and Participant 1 points out that, small adjustments in the content can be done internally at the Institute, but that bigger changes will have to be approved by the dean at the University. In difference from the participants from the teacher education, Participant 1 points out that he has little influence on the program decisions although he is involved in the processes, He points out that his responsibilities has more to do with formalities- such as sending the suggestions on what should be included in the content to approval. Moreover, Participant 1 points out that there also is a difference from the teacher education in terms of freedom connected to the lecture plan of the educational program, and points out that: “If it is not included in the course plan, it will certainly not be focused on. Maybe it will be mentioned in the passing” (Interview June 2010).

Through this, Participant 2 and 3 seem to have more influence on the contents of the program and the course they represent than Participant 1. In addition, the fact that there is more freedom in relation to lecture plans at the teacher education, indicates that some lecturers may appreciate the value of focusing of highly able children in that they incorporate it in their lectures. However, one may question the likelihood of this since the participants seem to have knowledge of that this is done. On the special pedagogy program however, little freedom as well as no found content related to high ability in the lecture plan and syllabus lists indicates that there is no coverage of highly able children on the special pedagogy program.

5.3.3 Is the coverage sufficient?

A simplified overview of the participants’ views on whether there is a sufficient coverage on high ability in the educational programs/course or not, is presented in table 4.4. As seen in section 5.3.2, neither of the participants are familiar with that highly able children are covered in the content of the program/course they represent. When it comes to the question if the coverage is of highly able children and their needs are sufficient, one may view the question as being: Is a non- existing coverage on highly able children and their needs sufficient?

Participant 1 expressed that highly able children are not a part of the special pedagogical field. When the participant expresses that the present coverage, which is seen to be no coverage, is sufficient, it seems to be based on that the alumni's from the special pedagogy program will not work with the highly able children. One may point out that this seems logical, since there is no reason to incorporate coverage on issues that are not seen as part of the field.

Nevertheless, as seen in section 2.4.2, others within the field of special pedagogy are positive towards including the topic of high ability into the field (Skogen, 2008). In such, there may be issues connected to the roles of alumni's that Participant 1 does not appreciate. In relation to this one may point to the value knowledge spreading on marginalized groups could have in education. The little information that seems to be found on the needs of highly able children in the Norwegian literature and research seems to indicate that the highly able children may be a marginalized group (see section 2.4). Hence, it may be argued that the needs of highly able children should be focused on through the field.

Participant 1 also connects the non- existing coverage of highly able children to the lack of focus on this group of children in the written documents of education, since as seen in previous section the decisions on content have to be based on these documents.

“There is no mentioning of the highly able children in the written documents, which is the curriculum, the Educational Act and the guidelines. And we (workers within special pedagogy) also have to be based on that” (June 17th 2010).

Through this, it seems that the coverage of high ability in the written documents influence the coverage of high ability in higher education. If this is the case, there seems to be a risk of that individuals working within education in general, including higher education interpret this as that highly able children are not to be focused on. Through the document analysis of this research it was found that there was some mentioning of highly able children (see figure 4.1). In such, the mentioning in the written documents seems to be ‘few’ rather than not existing. Nevertheless, Participant 1 points to something interesting. Few explicit mentioning's of highly able children in the written documents may, although the general guidelines and statutory implications in the educational system implicit regard all children, result in interpretations of that highly able children are left out of the field of Special Pedagogy.

Participant 2, from the general teacher education is of the opinion that the present focus is not sufficient. As seen through section 5.3.2, the participant has no knowledge of that highly able children have been covered on the educational program. As previously mentioned, these

children implicit are seen to implicit be a part of § 1-3 of the Educational Act (Opplæringsloven, 1998), and in such are to be covered by Adjusted Education. Interestingly, the participant calls out for a change in how Adjusted Education is understood, and calls out for research on the highly able children:

“These children (the highly able) need to be put on the research agenda. It is through research the importance of Adjusted Education is shown, and where the responsibility lies. They have to be made visible” (Interview July 9th 2010).

Through this, it becomes clear that the participant does not view the present situation when it comes to knowledge of highly able children and their needs as sufficient. In addition, Participant 2 points to another issue that she feels is important in relation to highly able children; that teachers do not have the sufficient subject skills.

“It has to do with the competence that teachers have within the subjects. Maybe you have to give Adjusted Education to children that are on a higher level than you are. It is really important to see the highly able children’s competences, to see what is positive for them. And acknowledge that high ability is something positive” (Interview June 9th 2010).

It seems likely that if teachers do not have sufficient subject skills, it may be difficult to meet the needs of highly able children through education. How do you teach to children that may have better skills than you? One may argue that increased subject skills could be useful, but that it may have limited value for the highly able children unless their needs in fact are known and acknowledged by teachers. This is to say that teachers that are unfamiliar with the fact that highly able children have needs that may differ from the ‘normality’ of the classroom, could have difficulties in meeting their needs through education, even though they may have good subject skills. Through this it could be important as Participant 2 seem to advocate, to focus on both increased subject skills and increased knowledge on the actual needs of highly able children and moreover, that the strengths and positive aspects of high ability are focused on.

Through section 5.3 it became clear that there has been some coverage of highly able children on the specialization course in previous years, but that the focus has been on what is seen in children that are ‘unhappy’ in schools. The focus does not seem to have been explicit on the needs of highly able children, and how they fit into Adjusted Education. It seems that Participant 3 view this as sufficient coverage, and point out:

“The responsibility has to be seen in relation to the task. If the law said that all children should reach their optimal potential through education, it would have to be more coverage in the teacher education. But, no! This is not what the Educational Act says” (Interview August 18th 2010)

It seems that the idea of providing Adjusted Education to highly able children by Participant 3 is seen as working towards that they should reach their optimal potential. In relation to this, one may derive two findings. First, in all the written documents investigated in this research Adjusted Education is referred to as being ‘for all’ (see table 4.1.1). Although, the Guidelines to the Educational Act seem to give openings for leaving the highly able children out of it, Adjusted Education is pointed out to be for all children. Second, the Norwegian educational system is based upon the idea of a Unified school, where equal opportunities for all children is seen as something important (see section 2.2). In such, it could be argued that to provide highly able children with Adjusted Education may be to provide them with equal opportunities as other children, rather than to focus on reaching of optimal potential. Although, no conclusions can be drawn due to the limitations of this research, it seems that this indicates that a focus on highly able children by Participant 3 is seen to go against the ideas stated in the written documents of Education.

Through this, it seems that the small coverage of highly able children in the written documents on education in Norway is influencing on both the understandings of the needs of highly able children, and how it is focused on in the educational programs. Although Participant 3 does not mention the importance of explicit mentioning of the highly able children may have in educational documents, one may argue that the call for research and such an explicit coverage of the highly able children in fact may be what are needed to improve the coverage of them.

In common for all of the participants are that they are not aware of that highly able children are on the content of the course/program they represent. Participant 2 calls out for increased focus on the highly able children, and does not view the non-existing coverage as sufficient. Participant 1 and 3 on the other hand express that they think content is sufficient. In such, there seems to be more similarities found between Participant 1 (that is from the special pedagogy program and Participant 3 (from the specialization course) than between the participants connected to the teacher education program (notably Participants 2 and 3). Through section 5.3, it is also pointed to that the ‘content’ category, as used in the analysis of the interviews, is seen as influenced and influential to the other categories. This may be seen

through that the views on what needs the highly able children have, how they fit within Adjusted Education and who are considered to be responsible for meeting their needs may influence on what is considered necessary to include on the content of the educational programs/ course.

5.4 Responsibility for highly able children

As seen through previous sections, highly able children are not seen to have special needs, and in such they are not qualified for receiving special needs education (5.1). Through this, it seems that the highly able children should receive Adjusted Education through the ordinary education. Nevertheless, as seen in section 5.2.1, Adjusted Education seems to be interpreted by the participants to regard the weaker pupils. The third sub question of this research has to do with who are seen to be responsible for meeting the needs of highly able children (see section 1.4). It seems that the views of the participants that have been treated in the previous chapters, is likely to serve as a base for who the participants consider responsible for the highly able children. The issue of responsibility must in such be seen in the light of other categories that are used in the analysis of data, and that are seen through the previous sections of this discussion.

The question of who should be responsible for meeting the needs of highly able children, led to different responses from the three interview participants (see table 4.5). Participant 1 and Participant 2 seemed to have a somewhat common understanding of that the principals have the responsibility of putting highly able children on the agenda in schools. Nevertheless, when participant 1 states that “if any are responsible it is the principals in schools” (Interview June 2010), it seems that there is an understanding of such a responsibility may not be necessary. This may be strengthened by looking at the participants views on the previous topics raised in the interviews. It seems that the participant points to that a lack of resources in schools make the needs of highly able children less of a priority, than for example, those of weaker students (see section 5.2.2). Participant 1 also stated that it is unlikely that principals put the highly able children on the agenda in schools. This would then imply that although it to some extent is acknowledged that the highly able children have needs, Participant 1 views it as unlikely that this is something that principals will focus on. Although one cannot make conclusions to the reasons for this opinion, it seems that it may be based on a combination of the views on highly able children and their needs, and the concern Participant 1 has in relation to the lack

of resources. In such, the issue of lack of resources may also influence the participants' views on who are seen to be responsible for meeting the needs of the highly able children.

Participant 2, on the other hand, points to that, the principals have to put highly able children on the agenda, to enable allocation of time and resources to meeting their needs. The fact that this participant also state that the teachers have responsibility in terms of meeting these children's needs, may also seem to connect to the previous topics covered in this discussion. As seen in section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, Participant 2 views the needs of highly able children to be like those of all other children, and in such, that these children should receive Adjusted Education. It seems that in order to contribute to this, there has to be responsibility in terms of both allocation of resources (from the principals) and direct work with highly able children (the teachers).

As seen in section 5.2.2, Participant 3 views the needs of highly able children to receive help if they have developed unfortunate consequences of education. Furthermore, the participant seems to be of the opinion that highly able children are not a priority in Adjusted Education. Based on these two factors one may argue that it would not be necessary with a focus on the highly able children, until possible unfortunate consequences become evident. It seems likely that this also would influence the views connected to responsibility. However, Participant 3 stated that the sky is the limit for the highly able children (see table 4.3). In such, it seems that highly able children are given opportunities to reach higher levels. On question regarding who may be responsible for meeting the needs of highly able children, the participant expressed that: "... the individuals have to take responsibility of their own education" (Interview August 18th 2010). In such, it seems that the highly able children are thought to be able to reach higher levels through education, but that there is no one that is responsible in helping them to reach these levels- except the individual himself.

5.4.1 Educators and schools roles in work with highly able

It seems that the issue of responsibility is closely connected to the roles alumni's of the different educational programs are seen to have in work with highly able children. As seen in section 2.1.4, Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talented (DMGT) may serve as a framework of how to understand these roles. In such, the views the participants have in relation to the perceived responsibility and roles of the alumni's of the program/course they are working within will be seen in relation to the DMGT model.

Alumni's from special pedagogy program

Participant 1 seems to be of the opinion that high ability is not seen to be a part of the field of special pedagogy. This is based on the view the participant has of that the field of special pedagogy has to do with special needs education, and as seen in section 5.1.2, highly able children are not entitled to special needs education. The participant also expresses that

“We (the program) are not necessarily directed towards schools. We do not educate teachers... So they (alumni's) do not have the competencies to teach in schools”
(Interview June 17th 2010).

The fact that teachers are seen not to have skills to teach in schools, through the ordinary education seem to support the notion made by the participant. This is to say that since highly able children is not entitled to special needs education, and that alumni's from the special pedagogy program will not be working in the ordinary education, the alumni's from the special pedagogy program may be seen as to not have responsibility towards meeting the needs of highly able children. One may also see this in relation to Gagné's DMGT model. It seems unlikely that alumni's from the special pedagogy program could work directly as what Gagné (2004, 2005) sees as environmental catalysts (see section 2.1.4).

Nevertheless, as seen in section 2.3.2, Skogen (2005) is one of the researchers within special pedagogy that make clear distinctions between the field of special pedagogy and special needs education. According to Skogen (2005), the work with special needs education may in fact only be one of two parts of the special pedagogical field. Participant 1's view on that high ability is not a part of special pedagogy may seem right when seen in relation to Skogen's (2005) first point on what the field of special pedagogy entails. However, through the second point made by Skogen (2005), the role of special pedagogy is seen as the contribution of knowledge that again may contribute to increased knowledge of the needs of different groups of children (see section 2.3.2). In the case of the work with highly able children, one may argue that the special pedagogy field may contribute to information on highly able children- which teacher's may benefit from in their work towards meeting the needs of these children. In such, there may be a likelihood of that a focus on high ability within the research field of Special Pedagogy could benefit highly able children, since Adjusted Education calls out for a focus on their needs.

In addition to disregarding the place high ability may have within the special pedagogical field, Participant 1 pointed out that people working with special pedagogy have more than

enough to do- without having to deal with the highly able children. Some researchers point out that there may be several positive aspects of including the highly able into the Special Pedagogy Field- i.e. contribute to strengthen the view of that diversity in school is something enriching and not a problem and to increase individual adjustment of education (Tangen, 2004). However, the views on such positive aspects do not seem to be shared by all within the field. One may even argue that an attitude connected to lack of resources as a main reason on why one should not focus on these children may overshadow the possibilities one have to meet their needs. In such, one may wonder if a strengthening of the view on diversity as something positive may be prevented, with negative consequences for both the highly able individuals and the schools.

It seems that although alumni's from the special pedagogy program most likely will not work directly with the education of highly able children, the knowledge the field may contribute to within education may benefit teachers work with the highly able children. In such, the alumni's from the special pedagogy program may be seen as indirect environmental catalysts to the development of highly able children, since they may influence on the knowledge and skills the teachers have in meeting the needs of these children. As seen in section 2.3, the children as the primary users of schools in Norway may benefit from collaboration between professions. In such, it seems that it could be useful and beneficial if the special pedagogy field contributes to knowledge to teachers- so that the primary users of the educational system (the children) are provided with a qualified staff in schools. By having more qualified staff in schools, it seems plausible that highly able children also will benefit from teachers that will work as environmental catalysts, according to the DMGT (Gagnè 2004, 2005).

Through this, one may point out that Participant 1 seems to not regard Special Pedagogy as having any responsibility for the highly able children. Regardless of how representatives of the Special Pedagogy field view their responsibilities towards children with high ability, it is a fact that teachers are the ones in contact with these children at a daily basis- and subsequently teachers are the ones that organize and adjust the education to meet the needs of individuals. In such, it becomes interesting to establish who, from Participant 2 and 3's point of view, that are seen as responsible for the highly able children.

Alumni's from teacher education

It becomes interesting to see whether Participant 2 and 3 who both are connected to teacher education program regard the responsibility of the alumni's from the program to operate as what Gagnè (2004; 2005) refer to as environmental catalysts in the children's learning. It seems that there is consensus among the participants on that Adjusted Education in the most part regards the weaker students (see section 5.2.1), and it seems that this is likely to influence the views of the participants when it comes to responsibility. The question becomes; do Participant 2 and Participant 3 regard the teachers as responsible for meeting the needs of highly able children?

As seen in section 5.4, Participant 3 points to that the highly able children have to take responsibility for their own development. The participant views high ability as either a base for aberrant development or as a possibility to reach higher levels (see section 5.2.2), and that the needs of highly able children is seen to be receiving help if they have developed unfortunate consequences of unsuited education. In relation to this, one may argue it seems like the responsibility teachers have, as viewed by Participant 3 is not that they should be environmental catalysts. This is to say, if the teachers only is to interfere when negative consequences become evident and that when children are seen to have potential for reaching higher levels they will have to manage on their own- the teachers may not serve as catalysts as seen by Gagnè's DMGT (2004; 2005). One may argue that, since what through Gagnè's DMGT seems to cause aberrant development are the lacks of catalysts in children's education, the two proposed ways of viewing the children's development cannot be seen isolated. In other words, the ability in the child may be the same, but what makes a child develop in a positive or negative direction may be consequences of how the schools and the teachers support the children through being catalysts. As seen in section 2.1.4, Hagtvet and Horn (2004) points out that there are seen strong links between positive development and early intervention. Thus, it may be worrying if the situation seems to be the opposite for the highly able children; that highly able children have to develop in a negative direction before intervention is seen to happen.

Participant 3 elucidates that although he views highly able children as having to take responsibility for their own education, this does not mean that teachers should prevent learning. It is suggested by the participant that it should rather be viewed as that the teachers,

as seen in section 5.2.1, are not as focused on the 1/3 of children in schools that do not get a satisfactory outcome of education. In relation to this the participant expresses;

“To what degree should society use resources on the small percentage (that are highly able)? It is not an elite school to develop the optimal in the few, but rather to ensure that all can be involved participants in society” (Interview August 18th 2010).

In such it seems that the perception held by Participant 3 is that one by focusing on highly able children one support an elite school system. One may question if the quote by Participant 3 may serve as an indication of that the experiences made by the researcher (see section 1.1), in terms of that a focus on the highly able is perceived as an argument for an elitist educational system, also may be evident within higher education.

Through section 5.4, it has become evident that Participant 1 and Participant 3 view the alumni's of their program as not being responsible for meeting the needs of the highly able children. Whereas Participant 1 from the special pedagogy program connects the issues of no responsibility to that highly able children are not a part of the special pedagogy field, Participant 3 from the specialization course in 'Adjusted Education and Special Pedagogical Competencies' point to that the children themselves are responsible for the education. Participant 2 is of the opinion that teachers should have responsibility for meeting the needs of highly able children, if there are resources allocated by the principals in schools. Through the section, it has been clear that the issue of responsibility is connected to how the participant's perceive issues within the other categories treated in this discussion. The mutual categories have also been seen as prevalent within the other sections of this research, and will be illustrated in section 5.5.

5.5 Mutual influences between the categories

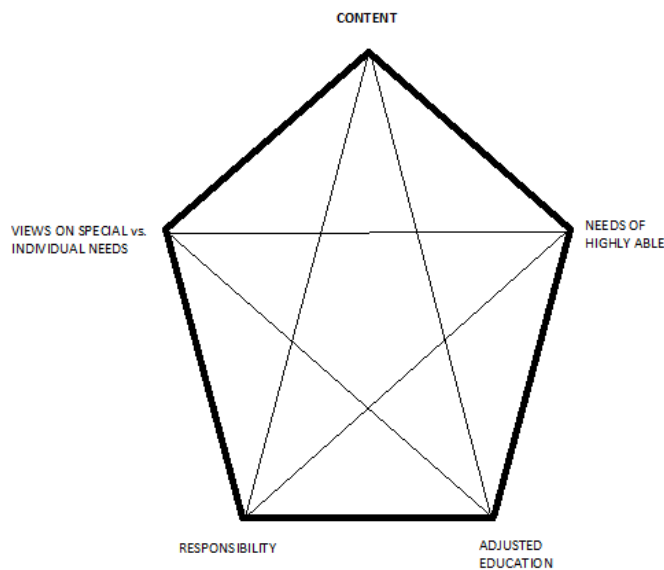
As seen through section 3.4.2, the five categories used in the analysis of the interviews are found to be mutually influential. This has also become clear through the previous discussion of this chapter, where all five of the categories are seen to influence on each other, some more than others. There has been shown that there has been mutual influence between the views the participants have on:

- Special Needs
- Adjusted Education

- Needs of highly able children
- Content
- Responsibility

Figure 5.1 is meant to serve as an illustration of the influences that have been seen through the interviews and the interview analysis.

Figure 5.1: Mutual influence between the Categories



In the following, three imagined and simplified examples are used to illustrate how such influences may be evident. Within the limitations of this research, these examples may point out that there seems to be possibilities of that the views on education of highly able children by other workers within education than the participants taking part in this research, also may be difficult to separate.

Example 1

If one has the view that highly able children do not have needs within education, it seems likely that one does not see a need to focus on them in Adjusted Education. Furthermore, in this scenario it may also seem almost redundant that professionals should have responsibilities towards meeting their needs. Finally, it seems likely that the content of the higher educational programs does not need to focus on them. Additionally, this may be seen the other way as

well. No specific content related to highly able children on the higher educational program seems to influence on how their needs are perceived, how to understand Adjusted Education and how to view questions related to who are responsible. This is to say; if high ability is not covered in the higher educational programs-, it may be perceived as less important than if is a part of the content.

Example 2

If one has the view that Adjusted Education does not include the highly able children; it seems likely that one understands the needs of the highly able in a different light than if one includes the highly able in ones understanding. It seems that such a view opens for a possibility that the needs of highly able children are less important or that they can manage on their own. By not including them in Adjusted Education, it may influence the views on who are responsible for addressing their needs. In other words, if the highly able children are seen to manage on their own, there is no need for specific responsibilities towards them and thus, no coverage is needed in terms of content of the higher education programs.

Example 3

It seems natural that if one views the highly able children as having needs in education that may differ from the 'normality', the highly able children will receive a focus through Adjusted Education. Subsequently, it seems likely that educators have a responsibility to meet these needs. It could be argued that if the views on the needs of highly able children are acknowledged by the overall educational field, the needs of the highly able children will receive attention in the higher education programs that educate the future workers within education. In such, to acknowledge that the highly able children have needs within education may also result in acknowledgement towards who are seen as responsible for meeting these needs and finally, that the needs of highly able children should receive focus through the higher educational programs.

Through this, one may argue that the topic of high ability could benefit from being focused on in its totality. This is to say, to only focus on the responsibility issue, may have little value without looking into i.e. what needs highly able children have within education or how they fit within Adjusted Education. Additionally, to change the content of higher educational programs to incorporate more on highly able children may call out for an increased focus on

what their needs actually are. Since this topic therefore obviously is of a complex and controversial character it seems that there are needs for holistic research to be able to realize positive developments within the field. The fact that the topic has not been a focus of research in Norway since 1971 may elucidate such a potential. In such, although the topic could benefit from being focused on in its totality, a start within one of the categories could give positive ripple effects to the overall field of high ability- through mutual influences between the categories used in this research, as illustrated in above examples.

5.6 Chapter summary

Through previous sections of chapter 5, the discussions have been related to the three sub-questions of this research (see section 1.4). This has been done through addressing the five categories used in the analysis. The first sub- question, treated through section 5.1, dealt with whether highly able children are seen as having ‘special needs’ in the Norwegian context or not. The analysis of documents and the interviews clarified that the needs of the highly able children are not seen as ‘special needs’, and subsequently, highly able children are not entitled to special needs education. In such, the discussion has shown that highly able children should receive Adjusted Education organized through the ordinary education.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 are connected to the second sub question of this research; Similarities and differences between the higher educational programs (see section 1.4). The similarities and differences have been approached according to three of the five categories that were used in the interview analysis of the research: Adjusted Education, needs of highly able children and content. The main similarities and differences that became evident through the discussion will be pointed to in the following.

All three of the participants seemed to have a wide approach to Adjusted Education, and were all familiar with interpretations of the term as only regarding children that may be considered as ‘weaker’. Participants 1 and 3 had similar views on that the needs of highly able children should not be a primary concern within education. They seemed to share concerns of that a focus on highly able children would be on the expense of children that may be defined as ‘weaker’. They were both of the opinion that the highly able children have needs, and seemed to share understandings of that they could manage on their own. Finally, they shared views on that the present coverage of highly able children on the program/course they represent is

sufficient. As regards the documentation analyses, there was found no coverage of the highly able children in the content in neither the specialization course nor the special pedagogy program at present time.

These views differ from the views expressed by the participant from the general teacher education (Participant 2). She expressed that although, the needs of highly able children at present time are not a part of the content of the teacher education program; changes should be made so that the needs of the highly able children are covered through the program. The participant expressed that this is necessary in order to ensure understanding of that the needs of highly able children in the Adjusted Education are similar to those of all children. Through this, it seems that there are more similarities between Participant 1 from the special needs education, and Participant 3 from the specialization course, than between the two participants from the teacher education (2 and 3). There may be difficult to say anything about why it is so, but two possible reasons may be: That Participants 1 and 3 have background within special pedagogy and thus share some views on highly able children, or it could suggest that the personal views of the participants reflect a small sample size as used in this research. Nevertheless, the views of all participants indicate that the needs of the highly able children, as seen in relation to Adjusted Education, is not something that receives much if any attention on the programs.

Section 5.4 has treated the issue of responsibility for meeting the needs of highly able children, and is related to the third sub- question of the research. Participant 2 pointed to that the alumni's from the teacher education program should have responsibilities in meeting the highly able children's needs, and acknowledged that the teachers could serve as what Gagne (2004) points to as 'environmental catalysts' in the work of highly able children. Participant 1 and Participant 3 seemed to hold a view of that these children would have to manage on their own, and in such that they should take responsibility for themselves. Whereas Participant 1 justified this by pointing to that high ability is not a part of the special pedagogy field, Participant 3 pointed out that the teachers have to take responsibility if a child displays aberrant development. In such, Participant 3 does not seem to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities teacher may have in work as 'environmental catalysts'.

Through the previous discussion, it was seen that the participants related their views on education of highly able children to the written documents on education. It seemed that the little mentioning of highly able children was interpreted as that they are not to be included in

Adjusted Education. Through section 5.5, it became clear that there is a mutual influence between the categories used in the analysis of this research. Through this, it seems that the written documents on education also have an influence within the other categories than

Adjusted Education. What becomes interesting in the following is to see how the information derived from the analysis of the three sub questions reflects on the main research question of this research and subsequently answers this. This is to say, what do the categories covered through the discussion in chapter 5 reveal about the “focus and acknowledgment of the needs of highly able children”?

6 Main findings

To what extent are the needs of children with 'high ability' acknowledged and focused on in two Norwegian higher education programs- Special Pedagogy and Teacher Education?

The approach to answering the main research question has been to find answers to the sub-questions 1, 2 and 3, by correlating these to the analyses of the categories presented in section 3.4.2. This is presented in the following and is considered the main findings of the research. The previous discussion has been necessary to fully understand the correlations and findings connected to the main research question. In the following, these findings are presented in two sections; Section 6.1 will treat the results related to what extent the needs of the highly able children are focused on. Section 6.2 will treat the results related to what extent the needs of the highly able children are acknowledged in the higher educational programs. This division is made since it is seen that to what extent the needs of highly able children is focused on may be easier to detect, than to understand to what extent the needs of highly able children are acknowledged.

6.1 To what extent are the needs of highly able children focused on?

As seen in section 5.3.2, to what extent high ability is a focus may be investigated through establishing the coverage of high ability in the educational programs. It was assumed that the coverage found online, in terms of resources used in the lectures and syllabus and the participants' views on the content would reveal the focus on the educational programs. Through section 5.3.2, it was found that there seems to be a non-existing coverage of the needs of highly able children at the higher educational programs at present time - including the specialization course.

Although there had been some coverage of high ability on the specialization course in previous years, participant 3 informed that this was not the case this year. In addition, the previous coverage of highly able children and their needs was by participant 3 pointed out to be more related to what unfortunate consequences one could see in children in school, and what the reasons for such unfortunate consequences could be (see section 2.3.2).

This point to two findings; Firstly, the needs of highly able children may be seen to not be a focus in neither of the higher education programs nor the specialization course within the teacher education. Second, in previous years when high ability has been covered to some extent in the specialization course, the needs of the highly able children were acknowledged in a limited way. Issues of to what extent the needs of highly able children are acknowledged will be covered in section 6.2.

Through this it seems that the extent to which the needs of highly able children are focused on in the higher education programs- including the specialization course is little, if at all present.

6.2 To what extent are the needs of highly able children acknowledged?

It is assumed that the actual focus on highly able children, as seen in the previous section, may be a result of two different factors. It could be that there is a conscious decision not to cover the needs of the highly able children, even with an acknowledgement of their needs. This is to say, the way their needs are acknowledged are seen not to influence focus in the higher education programs. Alternatively, it could be that the needs of the highly able children are not acknowledged, and in such it seems natural that they are not focused on through the teacher education and the special pedagogy program. This is to say, that if it is not acknowledged that these children have needs within education, there seems to be little that calls for that they should be focused on through the higher educational programs.

The views the participants have expressed in relation to the categories; special needs, the needs of highly able children, Adjusted Education, the content of the educational programs and responsibility, have revealed what can be viewed as indications of to what extent the needs of highly able children is something that is acknowledged by the participants. Although the researcher has an understanding of what the needs of highly able children are, the participants may have an understanding that differs from this, without being less valid or incorrect. What has guided the understanding of whether the participants' views on the needs of highly able children in fact are acknowledgement of their needs has been whether their view in fact is beneficial for the highly able children and on what grounds their views are based. To illustrate this; acknowledgement of that there may be unfortunate consequences of not providing Adjusted Education to highly able children but that they nonetheless are seen to

manage on their own is not considered as acknowledging their needs. This means that acknowledgement of needs of highly able children that do not safeguard their needs, but that rather is dimensioned by the availability of resources of educators (both alumni's from special pedagogy and teacher education program) are in this research not seen to be an actual acknowledgement of such needs. This is based on that children are seen to be the primary users of schools (see section 2.2.1). In such, it is the researcher's opinion that the needs of the children should come prior to the needs and limitations of the professionals working within education. Although the resources within school may turn out to be a concern in how one can meet the needs of highly able children, it seems unfruitful to start at this end.

Due to the nature of this research, there cannot be made generalizations as to how the broad range of representatives within education acknowledges the needs of highly able children. This research has shown the views of three participants, and how they acknowledge the needs of highly able children. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the findings made through this research point to clear tendencies of how the needs of highly able children are acknowledged within education. This is further supported by the fact that highly able children have received little focus on the Norwegian context, and the personal experiences the researcher has had (see section 1.1).

6.2.1 The special pedagogy program

Participant 1 seemed to be of the opinion that the concerns parents share online in relation to how their highly able children are being met in schools are real. In such, the participant seems to acknowledge that the highly able children have educational needs that may differ from the 'normality' in the classroom. Nevertheless, the participants view Adjusted Education as something that should not address the highly able children and on that, they should not be a focus within education. This is to say, that by acknowledging that some highly able children are not being specifically addressed through the Norwegian educational system and at the same time disregarding that this should be focused on, one does not acknowledge the actual needs of the children. By expressing that resources limits to what extent one can focus on the highly able children, and that the needs of highly able children are less important than the needs of children that may be defined as 'weaker', it seems that Participant 1 uses issues external to the children as reasons of why not to focus on them. As seen through section 6.2, acknowledgement of the needs of highly able children is assumed to be based on the actual

needs of children. Although one cannot assume how this is for people working within special pedagogy in general, one may argue that one by focusing on reasons to not focus on children that lie outside of the individual, one disclaim taking educator's responsibility.

Moreover, the participant seems to have strong opinions to that highly able children should not be a part of the special pedagogical field. Although it was shown through section 5.1, that highly able children are not seen to be a part of special needs education, they may benefit from being a part of what Skogen (2005) refer to as knowledge spreading through the special pedagogical field. As seen in section 2.3.2, the special pedagogical field is seen to contribute to understandings of marginalized groups. Through chapter 5, it became clear that the highly able children in fact may be a marginalized group, based on that there is little research and few understandings of how they fit in schools. In addition, this may be elucidated further by that the highly able children are seen to not be eligible for special needs education and not to be included in the understandings of Adjusted Education. In such, it seems that there lie great possibilities of knowledge spreading of the needs of highly able children by including them in the special pedagogical field of research. The fact that Participant 1 disregards that the highly able children should have such a place within the field, may elucidate that he does not acknowledge the needs of highly able children.

When it comes to the acknowledgement of the needs of the highly able children in the entire program, it may be difficult to draw conclusions based on only one representative from the program's views. Nevertheless, one may argue that there are indications of that more people within the special pedagogy field may hold these views. This assumption is based on two points: Firstly, the fact that there is little information and research found within the general field of education, as well as within the special pedagogy field, which in turn points to that the needs of highly able children may not be completely understood. Secondly, it seems that if there were representatives with connection to the program that acknowledges the needs of the highly able children, these needs would at least have been part of discussions within the program. It could for example have been a topic of the internal meetings at the faculty on what the content of the educational program should be. Although it is found that Participant 1 does not make the decisions on the program, he is present at the meetings. The participant is not aware of such discussion in the program.

Through this, it seems that Participant 1 only to a small extent if any acknowledges the needs of highly able children. The Participant also seems to be of the opinion that changes in relation to acknowledgement are not necessary.

6.2.2 The teacher education program

The two participants from the teacher education also seem to be of the opinion that there are unfortunate consequences of that the needs of the highly able children are not being met through the educational system. Nevertheless, their opinions differ when it comes to how they view the needs of highly able children. As seen in section 2.1.4, the teachers may be seen as environmental catalysts in the education of highly able children (Gagne 2004, 2005).

Teachers, and in such alumni's of the teacher education program, may have a more direct connection to the highly able children through education. Whereas Participant 2 seems to acknowledge that teachers being such environmental catalysts are important for the highly able children, Participant 3 seems to be of the opinion that highly able children have to take responsibility for their own education. In such, Participant 2 seems to acknowledge that the highly able children have needs that the teachers should work to meet through the education. Moreover, Participant 3 points to that high ability either can be viewed as a base for aberrant development or as a possibility. As seen through section 5.2.2, it seems that he in such separates an issue that in real life may not be separated. This is to say, without appropriate education, there may be consequences of aberrant development and with appropriate education, there may be possibilities for the child to reach higher levels. In such, it seems that Participant 3 does not acknowledge that the highly able children have needs in education unless they have developed unfortunate consequences.

The fact that both of the participants express that they are familiar with that Adjusted Education is seen to be mostly for the weaker students, also have certain implications on their acknowledgement of the needs of highly able children. Participant 2 is of the opinion that there should be changes concerning this, so that it is emphasized that the highly able children should be a part of Adjusted Education. Participant 3, on the other hand is of the opinion that it is not necessary to change the current practice. In such, Participant 3 seems more negative towards acknowledging that the highly able children may have needs that could be met through the education.

In such, it seems that Participant 2, from the General Teacher education program, to some extent acknowledge that the highly able children have needs- and points to that there should be changes in how one understands important concepts within education, so that highly able children also will be incorporated in the understanding. Participant 3 on the other hand, acknowledge that there may be unfortunate consequences of an unadjusted education for the highly able children, but does not see the educators to have any role in preventing such unfortunate consequences. In addition, Participant 3 seems to be of the opinion that the highly able children are able to manage on their own, and that the educators in such are not responsible for meeting their needs.

Through this, it seems that both participants from the teacher education, points to that there seems to be a small extent of acknowledgement of the needs of the highly able on the teacher education program at present time. Their views however, seems to be different since Participant 2 calls out for change whereas Participant 3 is of the opinion that there should not be a change.

Through sections 6.1 and 6.2, there seems that the extent to which the needs of highly able children are acknowledged and focused on through the higher educational programs is low, if at all present. It is therefore natural to question what possible consequences such a small or non-existing focus and acknowledgement may have for highly able children and the educational system in general.

6.3 Possible consequences of the found focus and acknowledgment

“Education shows great inertia once it has become established as a system, with a distribution of authority and with staff trained to follow in the footsteps of those already in place” (Lauglo 1995, p.255).

As seen in section 2.2.1, the history of education in Norway has consisted of different educational contexts and challenges. In such, the meanings of some of the educational ideas that are seen as important within the educational system have changed. One example is how the term Adjusted Education has had different meanings at different times. As seen in section 2.2.1, at the time when the Law on Special Schools was revoked Adjusted Education seemed to have been mostly connected to the children that may be defined as ‘weaker’, so that they would be included in the ordinary education rather than to be segregated. When all of the

participants are familiarized with interpretations of the term that still today regards Adjusted Education as being for the 'weaker' pupils', it is an indication of what is seen from Lauglo's (1995) quote presented above has happened with the term Adjusted Education. This is to say that teachers and staff within education follow in the footsteps already in place, even if the desired content of the term has been adjusted over time.

If this is the case, it seems that Adjusted Education is not meeting the challenges of today's educational context. One may argue that this may have negative consequences on the quality of an educational system. This is to say, that if the context of today calls out for a different education than present times did, but that there is an inertia connected to such changes, is the education today actual meeting the demands of the society?

In the initial parts of this research, there was presented a quote by UNESCO (2005). Through the quote, different aspects of what quality of education should entail becomes evident. As seen in section 2.2.1, educational challenges of today seem to be connected to the issue of quality of education. International research, such as the Pisa- study has led to concerns of that the Norwegian quality of education is not good enough. This shows that the issue of quality of education is a focus in the Norwegian education today. As seen through the quote from UNESCO (2005), the purpose of education is seen as important in how quality of education is understood. It is also pointed out that at least: education should ensure cognitive development of learners and help children to acquire values and attitudes that make them responsible citizens. In addition, it is pointed out that equity is a part of quality of education and that "an educational system characterized by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission" (UNESCO, 2004). As seen through section 2.2.1, to provide all children with equal opportunities has been an important part of the Unified school, which still is emphasized in Norway. Historically, the Unified school was seen to erase social differences, and this is something that still seems to receive a focus today.

Through the analysis of the interviews it seems that all three participants have, an understanding of that education should contribute to development. The fact that one educates children to become future citizens is also something that is seen as important, both through educational documents and by the interviews responses. One may look at the issue of discrimination in a way that the two previous issues have to be something that regards all children, in order to prevent discrimination. In such, all children should have cognitive development in schools and should acquire values and attitudes that will make them

responsible citizens through education. One may question whether interpretations of Adjusted Education that do in fact discriminate the highly able children by taking the view that highly able children are to manage on their own, in fact fail to ensure cognitive development in the group of highly able children. This is to say, do highly able children receive equal opportunities as other children through the Norwegian educational system, and is equity in relation to this group safeguarded in a way that prevents discrimination?

The lack of focus and acknowledgement of the needs of highly able children that is evident in the educational programs (see sections 6.1 and 6.2) seem to have been influenced by the written documents on education. Although, the educational context has changed, there may still be openings and ambiguities in the written documents leading to that Adjusted Education may be interpreted as in previous times. It seems that the inertia referred to by Lauglo (1995) may be sustained by that there is too wide room for interpretation of the educational documents, and that there through this is a possibility of that equity is not safeguarded.

One may argue that the fact that highly able children are not seen to be focused on and acknowledged through education, and that this is based on interpretations of the educational documents, there are needs for changes. If not specific and less ambiguous changes are made one may risk that there is a possibility of that the highly able children are more or less formally discriminated through the Norwegian educational system. As seen through UNESCO's quote as presented in the introductory pages of this thesis, this would mean that the quality of the educational system is failing.

The freedom of interpretation that is connected to the educational documents when it comes to the needs of the highly able may be partly explained by the lack of Norwegian research that is found within the field. As seen in section 5.5, it seems likely that the different categories used in this research will influence on each other. It could be argued that little research within either of the categories used, contribute to maintain the actual education of highly able children. Seen in relation to this, one may point out that further and deeper research would be necessary in order to make concrete guidelines on how one should understand the educational documents clearer and to remove controversy connected to the topic. Within the limitations of this research, it is clear that there cannot be drawn any conclusions as to what fields within education may benefit from an increased focus on highly able children. Nevertheless, one may point to that there are possibilities of that the educational challenges that Norway are seen as facing today could benefit from focusing on all children. To include education of

highly able children into the considerations of how one best can meet the educational challenges of today may possibly be beneficial. It could be argued that to remove controversy connected to the topic possibly could open up for beneficial arguments for the overall educational system, and society.

In such, among the areas that could benefit from being object of further research are:

- How high ability should be understood in the Norwegian context and what the official terminology for this group of children should be.
- How they fit into and benefit from Adjusted Education. This may also include how highly able children in the classroom may be beneficial for all children.
- Who are responsible for meeting the needs of highly able children?
- What roles each profession may have in the meeting with highly able children

Finally, it should be pointed to as seen in section 5.5, there lies a great potential in high ability research in the Norwegian context. Only the decision itself to acknowledge that there lays a challenge and opportunity in research and efforts related to highly able children in Norway may contribute to change. Through the interviews, the researcher got feedback from one of the participants that specifically points out the potential in knowledge spreading.

”When you interview me, I get some thoughts, right. I have not thought of this (highly able children), but I have to focus on this. This is a discussion that I should take part in” (Interview July 9th 2010).

One may argue that when this is the results of a small research for a master thesis, it is likely that there is a great potential in overall research on the field.

7 Concluding Remarks

As seen in the introduction of the thesis my personal experiences influenced me to undertake this research. Since it seemed to be little room for discussion on the topic of high ability in the study environment I was a part of, led me to question to what degree this was something that was evident among professionals working within education, as well.

Through the research there was found what seems to be substantial openings for interpretations when it comes to highly able children. All though Adjusted Education and equal opportunity is seen to be for all, it seems that openings are given to leave the highly able children out of the definitions. In addition, the experiences made by the researcher through the interviews seem to point to that there is a controversy among professionals connected to the issue of high ability. The combination of a controversial topic and that the topic is treated unclearly in written documents may result in that the definition of tasks and responsibilities that are connected to the highly able children are pushed down to levels lower than the legislative level. In such, the findings of this research indicate that it is unlikely that representatives within education will feel responsibility towards the highly able children. It seems that the consequence of the above give openings for that the safeguarding of meeting the needs of highly able children in the Norwegian educational system is not ensured.

In a time where quality of education receive extensive attention; one may question how the needs of a group of people within education can be as little addressed as the findings of this research indicate. Sustaining or improving quality of education could and possibly should mean that even the slightest indication of that a group of children is discriminated through education, would lead to that the issue is promptly put on the agenda. It could be questioned whether that the apparent controversy of the topic may result in covering up indications of such discrimination. The fact that there in the Norwegian context is found no research on the highly able children since 1971, is a significant finding in itself and points to that extensive research now is necessary. In such, the field of special pedagogy and general pedagogy should both contribute to putting the highly able children on the agenda through such research.

In conclusion and within the limitations of this research there are strong indications of that the highly able children are a marginalized group and possibly discriminated group in the

Norwegian context. To initiate necessary changes in the understanding of the education quality gap that this may be a result of, concrete and prompt actions are needed.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter (English version)



Oslo, xx/xx- 2010

To: xx

My name is Marit Qvam, and I am a student at the Master Program in Comparative and International Education (CIE) at the Oslo University. My research interest is the safeguarding of highly able children in the Norwegian primary education. The purpose of the study is to see to what extent highly able children should be focused on in the Norwegian schools, and how the focus on these children is today. In such, it is relevant if this is a focus in the higher education of future special educationalists/ teachers. In relation to this, I want to interview employees at universities and university colleges on the topic. Through searches on the web pages of the University/ University College and through conversations with my supervisor, Therese N. Hopfenbeck, I have found that it would be of interest to interview you.

The interview will take approximately one hour, and the interview participants and what Universities/ University Colleges that have contributed will be anonymous in the written product. All of the collected data and audio recordings will be deleted at the end of the study, December 2010.

It is wanted that the interviews will be conducted in July, but due to that the summer vacation will be in this period, I am flexible to do interviews in August as well.

I hope that this is something that you would like to participate in, and look forward to hearing from you.

With best regards,

Marit Qvam

Appendix B: Information letter (Norwegian version)



Oslo, xx/xx-2010

Til: xx

Mitt navn er Marit Qvam, og jeg er en mastergrad student ved master programmet i Comparative and International Education (CIE) ved Universitetet i Oslo. Min forskningsinteresse er ivaretagelsen av barn med særlige evner i den norske grunnskolen. Formålet med studien er å se i hvilken grad det bør fokuseres på barn med særlige evner i den norske skolen, og hvordan fokuset på disse elevene er i dag. Slik er det også relevant om dette er et fokus i den høyere utdanningen av fremtidige spesialpedagoger/lærere. I forbindelse med dette ønsker jeg å intervjuere ansatte ved universitetet og høyskole om dette temaet. Gjennom søk på Universitetets/ Høyskolens sine nettsider og samtaler med min veileder, Therese N. Hopfenbeck, har jeg kommet frem til at det ville være svært interessant å intervjuer deg.

Intervjuet vil ta ca. en time, og jeg vil i oppgaven anonymisere intervjuobjektene, samt hvilken høyskole intervjuene er foretatt ved. All innsamlet data og lydopptak vil makuleres/slettes ved prosjektets slutt, i desember 2010.

Det er i utgangspunktet ønskelig at intervjuene finner sted i juli måned. Siden sommerferien avvikles i denne perioden er jeg fleksibel til å gjøre intervjuer i august også.

Jeg håper dette er noe du kunne tenke deg å ta del i, og ser frem til snarlig tilbakemelding.

Mvh.

Marit Qvam

Appendix C: Informed Consent (English Version)

Informed consent for a qualitative research project

Title: To what extent are the needs of children with 'high ability' acknowledged and focused on in two Norwegian higher education programs- Special Needs Education and Teacher Education?

Main researcher: Marit Arnøy Qvam, student at Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education
(maritaq@student.uv.uio.no)

Institution: University of Oslo

Supervisor: Therese N. Hopfenbeck, ILS, University of Oslo
(t.n.hopfenbeck@uv.uio.no)

Research: The purpose of the study is to map the information that is given students at the teacher and special pedagogy program on the topic; children with high ability. Furthermore, to show who is considered responsible for that these children receive education adjusted to their predispositions and needs. The project will deal with two different higher education institutions.

Participation/ procedures: Participation in the project will consist of an interview that will last approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded, unless otherwise is requested by the participant. There may be additional follow-up/ clarifying questions per e- mail, unless otherwise is requested by the participant. Privacy issues will be assured through confidentiality. Participation in the project is voluntary, and the participant has right to end the interview at all stages of the interview.

The participants understanding:

- I agree to participate in this study, and understand that it will be handed in as partial requirement of the Master degree at the University of Oslo.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that all collected data will be limited to this use or to other research related use authorized by the University of Oslo.
- I understand that I will not be identified with name in the final written product.
- I understand that all findings will be confidential in the secure possession of the researcher and deleted/shredded at the end of the project (December 2010).

Signature Interview Participant/ Date

Signature Interviewer/ Date

Appendix D: Informed Consent (Norwegian version)

Informert samtykke for kvalitativt forsknings prosjekt

Tittel: To what extent are the needs of children with 'high ability' acknowledged and focused on in two Norwegian higher education programs- Special Needs Education and Teacher Education?

Hovedforsker: Marit Arnøy Qvam, student ved Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education (maritaq@student.uv.uio.no)

Institusjon: Universitetet i Oslo

Veileder: Therese N. Hopfenbeck, ILS, Universitetet i Oslo (t.n.hopfenbeck@uv.uio.no)

Forskning: Hensikten med dette studiet er å kartlegge informasjonen som gis til fremtidige lærere og spesialpedagoger om temaet: barn med særlige evner. Og videre hvem som anses for å være ansvarlige for at disse elevene mottar opplæring tilpasset deres evner og forutsetninger. Prosjektet vil ta for seg to ulike høyere utdanningsinstitusjoner.

Deltagelse/ Prosess: Deltagelse i prosjektet består av et intervju med varighet i ca en time. Intervjuet vil bli tapet, dersom ikke annet er forespurt av deltageren. Det kan bli ytterligere oppfølgings/ klargjørings- spørsmål per e-post, dersom ikke annet er forespurt av deltageren. Personvern vil bli sikret gjennom konfidensialitet. Deltagelse i prosjektet er frivillig, og intervjuobjektet har rett til å avbryte intervjuet på alle tidspunkt av intervjuet.

Deltagerens Forståelse:

- Jeg samtykker til deltagelse i dette studiet som jeg er inneforstått med at vil bli levert som delvis oppfyllelse av kravene for Mastergraden ved Universitet i Oslo.
- Jeg er inneforstått med at min deltagelse er frivillig.
- Jeg er inneforstått med at all innsamlet data vil bli begrenset til dette bruk eller annet forskningsrelatert bruk som er autorisert av Universitetet i Oslo.
- Jeg er inneforstått med at jeg ikke vil bli identifisert med navn i det endelige produktet.
- Jeg er klar over at alle funn vil forbli konfidensielle i forskerens sikre besittelse, og slettes/makuleres ved prosjektets slutt (desember 2010).

Signatur Intervjuobjekt/ Dato

Signatur Intervjuer/ Dato

Appendix E: Interview Guide (English version)

STRUCTURE

- 1) Can you tell me about the structure on the teacher education program/ special pedagogy program?
 - How long is the program?
 - How many subjects do you chose/ obligatory?
 - How many weeks of praxis?
 - Main goals of the education program?

CONTENT

- 2) How are decisions made on regards to what should be on the syllabus for the students?
 - To what extent are you involved in what is on the syllabus and lecture plans?
- 3) Are you familiar with that highly able children are covered through the teachings on the program?
 - If yes, what information is given? (Characteristics, international research, responsibility for meeting their needs?)
- 4) Do you think it should be more focus on these children on higher educational institutions?
- 5) Are you familiar with that any employees at this University/ University College have highly able children as their research interest?
- 6) Do you think the information on and the safeguarding on the highly able children is sufficient?
 - Should there be changes? To what degree do you think that universities and university colleges can contribute to meeting these children?

ADJUSTED EDUCATION

- 7) What does the term Adjusted education mean?
- 8) Internationally there are countries, i.e. the US that emphasize the needs of highly able children through law.
 - Do you have any thoughts on how this is in Norway?
 - How is it on your Institution?
 - Thoughts in relation to important educational principals in Norway? (i.e. Inclusion and Adjusted Education?)

SPECIAL NEEDS/ THE NEEDS OF HIGHLY ABLE CHILDREN

- 9) The term special needs is a central term in Norwegian education
 - Can you say something about how you understand the term?
 - How is this defined in the Norwegian context?
 - Should it include highly able children? Why/ Why not?

RESPONSIBILITY

- 10) What are teachers/ special educationalists responsibility in meeting with the highly able children?
- 11) Where do you think the responsibility to safeguard the needs of highly able children lies?
 - Teachers? - Schools? - Special educationalists?
- 12) Is there something else you would like to add?

Appendix F: Interview Guide (Norwegian version)

STRUKTUR PÅ GRADEN

- 1) Kan du fortelle litt om hvordan strukturen er på lærerutdanningen/spesial pedagogikk graden?
 - Hvor langt er studiet?
 - Hvor mange fag velger man, hva er obligatorisk?
 - Hvor mange uker praksis inngår?
 - Hovedmålene for utdanningen?

INNHold

- 2) Hvordan foregår bestemmelsene om hva som skal være en del av pensum for studentene?
 - I hvilken grad har du innvirkning på hva som er en del av pensum og undervisningen?
- 3) Undervises det i temaet barn med særlige evner ved ditt program?
(Hvis ja, hva slags informasjon gis? (F.eks. Kjennetegn, internasjonalt forskningsfelt, hvem som er ansvarlig for å ivareta barnas behov?))
- 4) Mener du at det burde være et større fokus på disse barna ved høyere utdanningsinstitusjoner?
- 5) Kjenner du til om det er noen ansatte ved universitetet/ høyskolen som har særlig begavede barn som forskningsinteresse/fagfelt?
- 6) Mener du at informasjonen om og ivaretagelsen av barn med særlige evner i den norske skolen er tilfredsstillende?
 - Er det noe som bør endres?
 - I hvilken grad mener du at universitet og høyskole kan bidra til ivaretagelse av disse barna?

TILPASSET OPPLÆRING

- 7) Hva ligger i begrepet tilpasset opplæring for alle?
- 8) Internasjonalt finnes det land, som for eksempel USA, hvor barn med særlige evner gjennom loven er ansett om å ha særskilte behov.
 - Har du noen tanker om hvordan dette er i Norge?
 - Hvis du tenker på din egen utdanningsinstitusjon, hvordan er dette her?
 - I forhold til de norske utdanningsprinsippene: for eksempel Inkludering og tilpasset opplæring

SÆRSKILTE BEHOV/ BARN MED HØYE EVNERS BEHOV

- 9) Begrepet særskilte opplæringsbehov er et sentralt begrep innen norsk utdanning.
 - Kan du si litt om hva du legger i begrepet særskilte behov?
 - Hvordan er det definert i norsk sammenheng? Er det tydelig nok definert?
 - Bør det innebære barn med særlige evner? Hvorfor /Hvorfor ikke?

RESPONSIBILITY

- 10) Hva er lærernes/ spesialpedagogenes ansvar i møte med barn med særlige evner?
- 11) Hvor mener du ansvaret for å ivareta disse barnas behov ligger?
 - lærere? - skolene? - spesialpedagogen?
- 12) Er det noe du har lyst til å legge til avslutningsvis?

